



Divisions 1 and 2, Weekend 2 by Rhys Cumming

Pool 1A

Guildford 1 have conceded just 2½ game points all season in their 4 wins so far, as they won both of their matches this weekend 7-1. While that is the sort of score-line that one might expect against Barbican 2, beating White Rose 1 by that margin is an impressive result even by Guildford's high standards. White Rose have finished in the top 5 in each of the last 4 years and had won their first 3 matches before facing Guildford, but only Colin McNab and Iain Gourlay managed draws on this occasion. White Rose are still in a good position however and barring an almighty collapse will make the Championship Pool. They are joined on 6 points by Oxford 1, who had a good weekend with wins over 3Cs 1 and Spirit of Atticus A. The result over 3Cs will probably prove crucial as with Grantham Sharks performing well so far, it seemed likely before that match that only 1 of those 2 team would make it through.

There were 7 decisive results in the match, but Oxford pulled through on the middle boards, with Oxford getting all of their 4½ points on boards 2 to 6, including wins for Tom Eckersley-Waites, Justin Tan, David Zakarian and Pavel Asenov. Oxford are still yet to play Guildford and White Rose, but they do still have a winnable match against Barbican 2 in round 6, and if they do win, they will likely find themselves in the Championship Pool for the first time in 3 years. The other side likely to make it through are Grantham Sharks 1 who beat Spirit of Atticus and drew with 3C's 1. They have 2 winnable games remaining against The ADs and Barbican 2 in their final 3 matches and may only need to win 1 of those to make it through to the Championship Pool. 3Cs do have an outside chance, but assuming they lose to Guildford next weekend, they will require one of the teams above them to lose to one of the bottom 3 of which there has been little sign so far.

They do still have to play Barbican and The AD's and wins in those matches should all but secure their survival. The 3 bottom sides: Barbican 2, Spirit of Atticus and The ADs are all set to go down into the Demotion Pool. The key result of the weekend was Barbican 2 beating The ADs, which was a must-win game for Barbican 2 after they lost to Spirit of Atticus in November. Round 5 will see The ADs against Spirit of Atticus, a match which The ADs will surely have to win to have any hope of staying up.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Guildford 1			7-1	7½-½		7-1		8-0	29½	8
2 Oxford 1				3½-4½	4½-3½		5-3	6½-1½	19½	6
3 White Rose 1	1-7				5½-2½	6-2		5½-2½	18	6
4 Grantham Sharks 1	½-7½	4½-3½			4-4		5½-2½		14½	5
5 3Cs 1		3½-4½	2½-5½	4-4			6½-1½		16½	3
6 Barbican 4NCL 2	1-7		2-6				3½-4½	5½-2½	12	2
7 Spirit of Atticus A		3-5		2½-5½	1½-6½	4½-3½			11½	2
8 The ADs	0-8	1½-6½	2½-5½			2½-5½			6½	0



Pool 1B

After 4 rounds the team leading the way in Pool 1B is Guildford 2 who have won all their matches so far by beating Wood Green HK and West is Best 1. The win over Wood Green HK was a comprehensive 6-2, despite Wood Green being the side that held Cheddleton to a draw at the first weekend. Guildford 2 were only rating favourites by 4 points per board, but won on all of the bottom 5 boards. They will face Cheddleton in round 5, in the match that will feature last year's 2nd and 3rd place finishers. Not only will the winner of that match likely determine who wins Pool B, it should also go a long way to determine who will be Guildford 1's biggest challengers, or more probably, who is the favourite for 2nd place. Cheddleton made no mistakes this weekend as they beat Blackthorne Russia and the team with the 2nd highest average rating in the pool this weekend: Barbican 1.

Despite Barbican winning on the bottom 2 boards, they were unable to compete against the spine of Cheddleton's team which featured GMs down to board 5 and were soundly beaten 5-0 on boards 2-6 to make the final score 5½-2½. Nevertheless, Barbican 1 should still make it through to the Championship Pool despite currently languishing in 6th place as they're only 2 losses so far have come against the top 2 sides. Although optically the table looks very close with 3rd to 6th place being separated by just 1 match point, the other team that is very likely to make it through is Wood Green HK in virtue of the fact that they have also played both of the top 2 sides. They preceded their loss to Guildford 2 with a win over Cambridge University 7-1, but whose most notable game was the 1, in which Daniel Bisby beat John Speelman with a fine attacking game featuring a piece sacrifice that can be seen at the bottom of this report. The two sides in the top 6 likely to miss out are Blackthorne Russia and West is Best 1. Both have notched up 2 wins so far, but in both cases those wins came against the bottom 2 sides in the table. If they are to challenge for the top half, each will need 2 wins in their final 3 games against much harder opposition.

The most likely of the two teams to achieve this is presumably Blackthorne Russia who will surely be strong favourites when the two teams face off in Round 5 but will need to beat one of Guildford 2 and Wood Green in the final 2 matches to give themselves a shot at making it to the Championship Pool. The two sides at the bottom of the table both remain pointless and while that isn't hugely surprising for Cambridge University 1, many including myself, tipped Alba to consolidate in Division 1 this season much as 3Cs did 2 years ago, but they have not lived up to their pre-season billing as they lost to both Blackthorne Russia and Barbican 1 this weekend. They will surely have to beat Cambridge in round 5 to give themselves a chance of staying up and strengthen for the final 2 weekends once the pools merge.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Guildford 2			6-2		5½-2½	5-3		4½-3½	21	8
2 Cheddleton 1			4-4	5½-2½		5½-2½	6½-1½		21½	7
3 Wood Green HK	2-6	4-4			4½-3½			7-1	17½	5
4 Blackthorne Russia		2½-5½				3½-4½	5-3	5½-2½	16½	4
5 West is Best 1	2½-5½		3½-4½				5-3	5-3	16	4
6 Barbican 4NCL 1	3-5	2½-5½		4½-3½			5½-2½		15½	4
7 Alba		1½-6½		3-5	3-5	2½-5½			10	0
8 Cambridge University 1	3½-4½		1-7	2½-5½	3-5				10	0



Pool 2A

If one wanted evidence that Division 2 is stronger than ever, two sides featured 2600+ players this weekend. The two teams in question, Manx Liberty and Celtic Tigers, both went into the weekend with two wins and would face each other in round 4. While Manx Liberty were able to win their Saturday match against Grantham Sharks 2 comfortably, Celtic Tigers could only draw with Wood Green Monarchs. When the two leaders met on Sunday, Manx Liberty were run close but managed to win 4½-3½. That will likely be Manx Liberty’s toughest match of the season and it will be a surprise from here if they don’t go on to win Division 2. Celtic Tigers are still in a good position to make it into the Promotion Pool, but there looks to be a tight 4-horse race for the 3 remaining spots. Celtic Tigers are joined on 5 points by Wood Green Monarchs, who had a good weekend, as they followed up their draw with Celtic Tigers with a win over Grantham Sharks 2.

The other two teams in contention to make the Promotion Pool are King’s Head and Sussex Martlets. King’s Head only came into the weekend with 1 point out of a possible 4, but they featured a strengthened team including Hastings winner IM Lou Yiping on top board. They won both of their matches to join Wood Green and Celtic Tigers on 5 points, with a win over White Rose 2 and a key win over the Sussex Martlets who are now 1 point behind on 4 points. Meanwhile there are 3 teams languishing near the bottom of the table: White Rose 2, Grantham Sharks 2 and Barbican Youth. All 3 can take solace from the fact that this pool is almost certainly the tougher pool, but the results they get against each other will be key for when the pools merge after round 7. The team in the worst position is Barbican Youth, who lost on the Sunday against White Rose 2, meaning they have now lost to both teams that are most likely to join them in the Demotion Pool.

They look to have a slightly better squad than the one than last year, but in such a strong division, that might not be enough. Grantham Sharks 2 meanwhile had 2 tough matches and lost them both: against Manx Liberty and Wood Green Monarchs. White Rose 2 and Grantham Sharks 2 will meet in round 6: the winner will have gone a long way to ensuring safety and the loser will need a strong last 2 weekends.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Manx Liberty			4½-3½	5½-2½	5½-2½		6-2		21½	8
2 Kings Head			3½-4½		5½-2½	5-3		4-4	18	5
3 Celtic Tigers	3½-4½	4½-3½		4-4			5-3		17	5
4 Wood Green Monarchs	2½-5½		4-4			4½-3½	5-3		16	5
5 Sussex Martlets 1	2½-5½	2½-5½				4½-3½		5-3	14½	4
6 White Rose 2		3-5		3½-4½	3½-4½			6-2	16	2
7 Grantham Sharks 2	2-6		3-5	3-5				5-3	13	2
8 Barbican Youth		4-4			3-5	2-6	3-5		12	1



Pool 2B

While this does look to be the slightly easier of the 2 pools, there is still a great deal of competition for the places in the Championship Pool as evidenced by Warwickshire Select who only narrowly missed out on promotion to Division 1 last year languishing down in 6th place after 2 weekends. The division is topped by North East England who were also a whisker away from being in Division 1 this year but were relegated from the top flight. They drew their round 3 match against Warwickshire Select 1, in a match featuring only 1 decisive result for each side with wins for James Moreby and Andrew Baruch respectively and followed it up on the Sunday with a win over KJCA Kings. Narrowly behind them are Guildford 3, who won both of their matches this weekend as they beat Poisoned Pawns 1 and upset Anglian Avengers 4½-3½. That match featured 7 draws and a decisive result on board 8 where Philip Stimpson won with black against Stephen Gregory despite being the rating underdog.

Guildford 3 should now need just one more win to make the Promotion Pool. Anglian Avengers did win on the Saturday though against West is Best 2, which means they should still find their way into the Promotion Pool but they do still have two tough games left against North East England and Manchester Manticores. Manchester Manticores had a very good weekend as they smashed KJCA Kings 7-1 and then won comfortably against Warwickshire Select 2 by a score of 5½-2½. West is Best 2 and Warwickshire Select are both still in contention and it seems that any of the top 6 could go up into the Promotion Pool. The two teams that will likely not make it into the top half are KJCA Kings and Poisoned Pawns. Both of these sides have really struggled so far and both their round 3 and 4 matches. It looks as though both will need to strengthen their teams for the run-in to get the results required to still be in Division 2 this time next year.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 North East England				4½-3½	4½-3½	4-4	5-3		18	7
2 Guildford 3			4½-3½	5-3	3½-4½			6½-1½	19½	6
3 Anglian Avengers 1		3½-4½			5-3	6½-1½		4-4	19	5
4 Manchester Manticores 1	3½-4½	3-5				5½-2½	7-1		19	4
5 West is Best 2	3½-4½	4½-3½	3-5					6-2	17	4
6 Warwickshire Select 1	4-4		1½-6½	2½-5½			4½-3½		12½	3
7 KJCA Kings	3-5			1-7		3½-4½		5-3	12½	2
8 Poisoned Pawns 1		1½-6½	4-4		2-6		3-5		10½	1



Featured Game:

White: Jon Speelman (Wood Green HK)

Black: Daniel Bisby (Cambridge University 1)

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. d4 g6 3. Bg5 Bg7 4. Nbd2 O-O 5. e3 d5 6. Bd3 Nbd7 7. h3 c5 8. c3 b6 9. O-O Bb7 10. Qb1 Re8 11. Bf4 Nh5 12. Bh2 e5 13. Bb5 e4 14. Ne1 Nhf6 15. a4 a6 16. Be2 Nf8 17. a5 Ne6 18. axb6 Qxb6 19. Nc2 h5 20. Qa2 cxd4 21. cxd4 a5 22. Nb1 Bf8 23. Nc3 Bd6 24. Bxd6 Qxd6 25. Rfc1 Kg7 26. Na3 Rh8 27. Nab5 Qb8 28. Qa3 Ra6 29. Na4 (Diagram 1) Ng4 30. hxg4 hxg4 31. g3 Ng5 32. Bxg4 Rf6 33. Qe7 Nf3 34. Bxf3 exf3 35. Nc7 Rh1 (Diagram 2) 36. Kxh1 Qh8 37. Kg1 Qh3 38. Ne8 Kh6 39. Qf8 Kg5

Diagram 1:



29... Ng4 30. hxg4 hxg4 31. g3 Ng5 32. Bxg4 Rf6 33. Qe7 Nf3 34. Bxf3 exf3 35. Nc7

Diagram 2:



35... Rh1 36. Kxh1 Qh8 37. Kg1 Qh3 38. Ne8 Kh6 39. Qf8 Kg5 0-1

PGNs for all the games played this weekend can be found at: <http://www.4ncl.co.uk/downloads.htm>