

Development Officer's Report for 2010-2011

by John Alfred

Because Irish chess receives little or no funding outside itself, a small community of chess entrepreneurs has developed over the years offering coaching, equipment, leagues, tournaments, camps, etc. This is not bad in itself, as it leads to more robust structures than if it depended on charity money which can be dropped abruptly as happened with the CheckMate League back in the early 2000's.

Irish Chess is a partnership (not always readily admitted to!) between private and community run chess projects giving a vibrant chess scene with plenty of scope for improvement.

School team Leagues:

Ireland has the biggest schools leagues in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and they are self-funding.

Last season some 300 teams took part in the privately run ChessZ and CheckMate Leagues (not for loss), and c 50 teams in the Leinster Schools (not for profit) leagues. In addition to that, other small leagues run in other locations in Ireland, maybe bringing the number of School teams to c 370 in total. Not bad at all.

The ICU does not have the resources to run these leagues as they require 1000's euros of risky investment and 3 man-months to administer in the case of ChessZ and CheckMate.

School Leagues spur chess development in schools. It was CheckMate that got School chess to the level it is now. This last season saw a drop in School League activity mainly due to the recession, but they proceeded nonetheless and had to be advertised twice to get numbers up but still short of the previous years.

Christian Brothers College Cork are without doubt the strongest Secondary School in Ireland having won both Secondary Schools Leagues. St Pats de la Salle/Castlebar won the Primary Schools ChessZ league and Creagh NS/Ballinasloe won the PS CheckMate League. Scoil Pol/Kilfinane won the Secondary Schools Girls League, and Scoil-Ide/Limerick won the PS girls league. Several reports can be seen on the ICU site under 'News' and then 'Schools Finals'.

Individual event winners included Hugh Doyle, Sarah-Jane Hearne, Nora MacNamee and Jeffrey Alfred.

Grandmaster Fund:

The Irish Chess Union will be 100 years old next year which is a record in itself. However, we have still not produced a home grown Grandmaster – it's easier to become a billionaire in Ireland. It's long been a goal of mine to facilitate the development of one with the help of funding to attend GM Norm tournaments.

At the June ICU meeting I proposed the creation of a Grandmaster Fund. The Motion failed. However I have decided to run it outside the ICU now.

Transition Year Chess:

Last September 2010, Dr John Courtney, Darko Polimac and I met the then Minister for Education, Mary Coughlan, with a view to getting chess introduced in Schools.

She replied some weeks later saying that no plans existed to introduce it as part of the school Curriculum at the moment, but that we should consider Transition Years in Secondary Schools. A pilot programme is being tried in Secondary Schools in Limerick and Kilkenny in the 2011-2012 school season.

Chess in Libraries:

Libraries are another place where junior chess is being tried out. At least 3 in Cork city, with more in Dublin and Kilkenny are being tried out.

MFL (Moves for Life):

A committee under the chairmanship of Kevin O'Connell is being formed to attract funding for teaching chess in Schools. A number of meetings have been held already.

How do we compare Internationally?:

I had the honour of attending the World Youths Chess Championships last Autumn in Greece. The best score we were able to achieve was 5.5/11 – 50%. Our most common score was 3 out of 11 games. The cream of our Junior players were there and that was all we could do.

ICU MEETINGS

There were c6 ICU meetings held over the season. The first was held in September at Portlaoise. After this, several meetings were held on Skype. This was a major problem for me as my new computer wouldn't run Skype.

The matter was eventually referred to the Arbitration Officer for an opinion, and he advised that for every Skye meeting there should be at least one 'Physical meeting'.

Two 'Physical meetings' followed in May and June, the May one coinciding with my Limerick monthly which had been advertised for seven months. Travelling expenses were also withdrawn and this is a problem for those outside Dublin. For instance, travelling from/to Limerick takes 7 hours and costs 50+ euros, while those in Dublin spend little money and little time travelling.

So I have been disenfranchised for at least 4 meetings during the year and it seriously affected whatever else the Development position could have achieved.

John Alfred
10-Sep-2011