

NOTES FOR NEW COUNTY CAPTAINS – Julie Johnson

You have been brave (or foolish) enough to agree to run a county team. The first thing to remember is that whatever happens, it will probably have already happened to other captains. There are a number of very experienced county captains in the MCCU and your current County Controller was a county captain for many years – in other words there are several of us who can say “been there, done that, worn the T-shirt”, but we were all “newbies” at some time. Do not be afraid to ask, the fact that you don’t know something doesn’t mean you are stupid. Use the knowledge & experience of those well past the “newbie” stage. Most will be happy to help.

Before you do anything else –READ THE RULES - and anything else sent out by the controller. If you don’t understand something – ask.

If you are taking over a team, get as much information as you can from the previous captain. They should have contact details for the players they used, bear in mind that the new gradings may mean that some players are no longer eligible, but may also bring other players into the grading band for your team. Your own county website may publish gradings for county players, or your local grading officer may well help in providing a list. Captains of teams above or below may also have contact details for players who are eligible for your team. They will also know of venues that can be used for home matches.

I would recommend that you start to organize your team at least 3 weeks before the match, and ideally have players on standby in case of mother-in-law visits, flu, disasters at work, lottery wins etc. I would also suggest that reminders are given by phone a few days before the match. Some chess players have an unfortunate tendency to forget the dates of matches.

For away matches or neutral venues, ensure that players from the same geographical area, who are intended to travel together, have each others contact details, and that drivers have details of where the venue is & what time they need to be there. Also make sure players are clear about venues & start times for home matches, especially if you are not using a chess club venue, or are not at one commonly used for county matches.

If a neutral venue is called for, then start making the arrangements as soon as you get the fixtures. As home and away venues are no longer automatic, unless the 2 counties playing have a common border, you need to contact the other captains in your section to establish preferences. If you as the away captain wish to play at a neutral venue, it is your responsibility to sort one out, but it must be in a reasonable location & a reasonable cost. Captains in the county you wish to play in may be able to suggest venues & I will do what I can to help. If captains can’t agree on the suitability of a venue, they must contact me for a ruling. If you are happy to play in the “home” county you need to let the other captain know so that they are aware they need to book a venue.

Venue - This should be quiet, big enough to take 16 boards (or 12 for the U120 & U100 sections). Stewart Reuben suggests that for 32 players, 96 square metres is a minimum requirement. Good lighting, good access to loos are musts. If the venue is up a set of stairs, then you **MUST** ensure that the opposition and yourself do not have players with mobility problems. The team captain must notify the captain arranging the venue in good time if they are bringing such a player, then arrangements must be made for that game to be in an equivalently good room. Playing in a public bar is a definite **NO NO**, as is suggesting that a captain selects somebody else, or that a player is carried up some stairs by other players – all of which I had as a team captain with such a player.

Equipment - I suggest that 18 sets, boards and clocks (14 for U120 matches) together with 40 score sheets are provided. The extra equipment is for clock breakdowns, and to provide spare sets and boards in case there is a contested draw by repetition claim. (That happened when Cyril was playing the late John Robinson in a match. There were no spare sets or boards. They had to stop their game and then restart it after finding that the claim was in error.)

Refreshments – It is no longer necessary to provide a “spread” for matches. I would regard as a minimum free tea, coffee and squash with some biscuits. If there is access to a bar, then so much the better, but free refreshments should also be available.

Team lists & “away” matches - If you are the only person with a team list, sods law will apply, the car you are travelling in will get held up and arrive late. I suggest that 3 different cars have copies of the board order so as not to cause delays. Please ensure that as many people as possible know the mobile numbers of others travelling, and the home captain's phone number. Ideally at least have the mobile number of someone in each car, other than the car driver, who may not have “hands free” facilities for their mobile. This will ensure that if you do hit the great English hobby, road works, at least people know what is happening.

Mobile Phones - Before the match starts remind players to, switch mobiles phones & the like OFF or to silent. If they ring, you lose. Some do not approve of this, but it is part of both FIDE laws & the MCCU rules.

Clocks - The clocks should be placed so that they are visible to other players. The Laws of chess do not state that Clocks go on white's left hand side. They go where the arbiter says. (Art 6.4 of the Laws of Chess). If all the clocks in a row face the same way it makes it easier to spot potential time scrambles. It also makes it easier if all the clocks are set to the same hour, ideally so that 6 o'clock is the flag fall. This avoids confusion & allows faulty clocks to be spotted more easily.

Time Controls & recording moves - Two things are often misunderstood by players which you as captain should be aware of and be able to correct –

1 - At present, if you have less than 5 minutes left on your clock, you do not have to keep score. But, if that is the first time control, you must bring your score sheet up to date in your time after the time control is reached. If it is your opponent who has less than 5 minutes, you must continue to keep score until you have less than 5 minutes left.

2 - If you have less than 2 minutes in the final time control, you have the right, if it is your move, to stop the clocks and claim a draw on the grounds that either your opponent cannot win by normal means, or is not trying to win by normal means. If there is an arbiter present, he or she can give a decision then or later. There is no appeal against that decision. If no arbiter is present then the game ends there and then an up to date score sheet with the current position must be sent to the controller for a decision, if the claim succeeds then the game is a draw. If the claim fails, the claimant loses the game.

Things will go wrong, when they do, try to keep calm. Can you take action to rescue the situation? – if so, do it without delay. So for example if your chosen venue has a burst pipe a few days before the match and you won't be able to use it – is there another venue you can use instead? If there is, contact your opposite number, explain the situation & provide details of the new location. If there is nothing you can do to rescue the situation, or efforts to do so have come to naught, contact your opposite number and contact me as soon as possible.

When you are hit by the captain's worst nightmare of several players pulling out at the last minute, with your standby players all used up, phone calls to anyone & everyone else you can think of coming up blank, and you fear that every time the phone rings it is someone else pulling out; the last thing you do is simply turn up to the match short of players. If you cannot avoid defaulting a board or boards, let the other captain know. There is nothing more annoying than to have a player or players make a journey only to find they are not going to get a game, and will have to kick their heels until the players they traveled with have finished playing, and then to find out the captain knew in advance.

If you are having any problems in connection with a particular fixture, do not simply sit back & hope for the best. Most captains are keen to play matches rather than claim them, but you can't expect them to be sympathetic if you contact them the night before the match with a problem that was clearly evident much earlier. Remember that as Controller I am here to facilitate the event, but I cannot help if I don't know there is a problem. Communication with your own players, the other captains and me is key; most of the problems that arise are due to communication issues or failure to read the rules.

If something happens and you are unsure about the interpretation of the MCCU rules, contact Counties' Tournament Controller. If there is an issue relating to the Laws of Chess contact the Counties' Tournament Controller or one of the other ECF arbiters listed on the contact details you can find on the captains' page of the MCCU website.