

Surrey Chess



Subject: COVID-19 Response within SCCA and Surrey clubs

Dear Club Secretaries,

I am sure that, like the rest of the country, you are monitoring developments in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak in Britain and the government's advice and mandates related to it.

As you know, on Sunday 15th March, SCCA suspended all of its evening league club chess competitions and its individual competitions with immediate effect. I would like to share with you some of the rationale behind that.

The recent SCCA Survey (more of which will be reported in a separate communication), which had a very good response, indicated that about 30% (vs a UK average of 18%) of respondents were aged 65 or more. This would be intuitively obvious to anyone in the chess world. We have a relatively aged population. The older members of the general population are most at risk of mortality due to the virus and so the chess playing community is more vulnerable than average to COVID-19.

The nature of the game of chess means that opponents sit close to each other for protracted periods of 2-3 hours (in our competitions) and they touch the same pieces during play. It is impractical for them to wash their hands after every move. Hence the game of chess, played face to face, creates a significant exposure to one's opponent.

That is why the SCCA Board on Saturday 14th March were discussing whether to immediately suspend SCCA competitions or to canvass our clubs' opinions on that possibility. At that time the ECF advice arrived that evening leagues should consider an immediate suspension of their chess competitions. That advice pushed us to an immediate suspension of our competitions.

I should like publicly to acknowledge the ECFs important and helpful leadership on this matter.

With hindsight that was clearly the right call in light of subsequent evolution of government advice, firstly on social distancing for all and secondly in relation to protecting vulnerable groups, including the over 70s. That further government advice led the SCCA to post on its website on 17 March advice to its affiliated chess clubs to cease their club meetings with immediate effect.

For clarity, running a chess club at a physical venue at the current time is entirely inconsistent with government and public health advice. Players sitting across a chess board cannot be regarded as having socially distanced themselves and are clearly closer than 2 metres from each other. This is a time to be responsible not just for each other but for the wider community at large. Hence chess clubs should not be meeting under the current government advice. While our previous announcement on 17 March made it clear that our affiliated clubs are autonomous organisations and that SCCA cannot compel clubs to take actions I should like to remind any clubs who are minded to ignore this advice of the SCCA Board's powers under article 34 of the SCCA articles of association. This matter needs to be taken very seriously.

For all of the reasons mentioned above we would also discourage chess players from meeting up informally to play face to face, except where they already live under the same roof. There are many online opportunities to play chess. One such opportunity was outlined in the last ECF Newsletter which your club members might like to consider.

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Moving forward there is much uncertainty as regards the duration that the current government advice will be in place, depending on the development of the epidemic. Hence it is far too soon to be able to determine how or if we can complete the current season's chess competitions. The SCCA Board will continue to monitor events and provide updates where appropriate.

However right now chess is rather incidental. The health of all of our chess participants and of the wider public is the over-riding consideration for all of us. With that said I should like to wish you and all of your club members good health and that you all stay safe during this difficult time.

Your sincerely,

Paul Shepherd (signature on file)

SCCA President for and on behalf of the SCCA Board

23 March 2020