

SASRA CHESS CLUB WIN THE WHITAKER TROPHY FOR THE SECOND TIME IN THREE YEARS

SASRA vs Penrith Whitaker 2, 28th April, 2012

SASRA			Penrith Whitaker (2)
Phil Almond	0.5	0.5	Kevin Southernwood
Mark Mallard	0.5	0.5	Eggert Früchtenicht
Alan Fox	0	1	Lewis McAtear
James Taylor	1	0	Dave McMath
	2	2	



Penrith had a handicap of -0.5 points so the adjusted score was SASRA 2 Penrith Whitaker (2) 1.5

Penrith travelled the long and winding road to Seascale for the second time this season to play out the drama of the Whitaker Cup Final. SASRA have definitely been Penrith's bogey team of the year: they inflicted an unexpected draw on Penrith A in the first half of the season and a thoroughly depressing title-pursuit dampening defeat in the play-offs. Surely it would be third time lucky for Penrith; or is it bad things that come in three's?. All one can say is that Penrith started as they meant to go on by handily losing the toss, giving us black on boards 1 and 3. A quick calculation of the grades left us with a half-point handicap, more of a mole hill than a mountain to climb, you might think, but...

On board 1 Phil Almond opened 1.c4 for SASRA and I replied 1...Nf6 and the English Opening duly unfolded after I switched back into a Reversed Sicilian line with 2...e5. A fairly cagey opening contest ensued as we rattled through the first 8 or 9 moves but at some point Phil flung a knight out to the side of the board on h4, which seemed a little pointless and black, with almost a 'free' move, managed to resolve whatever opening difficulties he may have had, emerging very comfortably from the start of the game.

On board 2 Eggert Früchtenicht opened 1.e4 and Mark Mallard replied 1.e6 and the Advance Variation of the French Defence duly marched into view. I'm pretty sure that Eggert somewhat misplaced his dark-squared bishop on e3 and Mark manoeuvred quickly to take advantage. It certainly wasn't fatal for white, but my overall impression sitting next to Eggert's board was that black was doing well, certainly equal, possibly a little more.

On board 3 Lewis McAtear had been looking forward to a re-match with SASRA's James Taylor - with good natured thoughts of revenge in his mind for the defeat James inflicted on him in their previous encounter. However it was not written. Instead he faced Alan Fox, who opened 1.e4 to which Lewis replied 1...d5 and off to Scandinavia they toddled. I think things took an unexpected turn at some point as the position looked a little odd but I suspect 'odd' was more to Lewis' taste than Alan's and I had black down for choice.

Dave McMath opened 1.e4 for Penrith on the fourth board and James Taylor replied 1...e6, another French Defence. An opening muddle led to the loss of a pawn and could possibly have led to worse still. Dave stabilised the situation but there was no denying black's advantage.

Lewis' was the first game to finish putting some points on the board for Penrith. Alan lost a pawn and then another and Lewis needed no further invitation to finish off the job. Our victor - in his very own style - adjourned to the bar to sample the delights of the vineyards and hop fields of Seascale and catch up on the footballing news.

The next and considerably later result was far less welcome. Dave had long been struggling on board 4. James engineered a passed 'a' pawn on the queenside and despite Dave's best efforts to generate play, rather than descend into passivity, the 'a' pawn ponderously plodded ever closer to the endzone.

In the end, the end was nigh. One point each and, having lost against the grade, Penrith's task was now much harder.

On Board 2 Eggert, conscious of Dave's difficulties, had already turned down one draw offer from Mark. Truth be told though there was little to play with in a position that remained stubbornly equallish or slightly worse for white. A second draw offer duly arrived from Mark and Eggert, reluctantly accepted after consulting his team mates.

This left only board 1 in play. I'd possibly been over-pressing my position against Phil as I thought - at that time - that I had an edge. A fit of attacking enthusiasm left me a pawn down and behind on the clock as Eggert's result came in. I suppose I should have expected it but Phil fairly quickly offered the draw. Although black wasn't necessarily lost I was pretty convinced that a draw was about the best result I might hope for and, after a bit of consultation and some heart-searching, decided to accept. Overall result 2-2: adjusted for handicap 2-1.5 to SASRA.

Congratulations to the winners.
by Kevin Southernwood, Penrith Chess Club
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