

England Primary Schools Chess Championships

Prestatyn 19th to 21st June 2009

'No one would have believed, in the first half of 2009, that EPSCA affairs were being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's (well, we're doing our best!). No one gave a thought to younger schools like St Teresa's as a source of winning chess games. Yet across the gulf of Newcastle, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic regarded other teams with envious eyes, slowly and surely drawing their plans against them. Few voices were ever raised in warning as, with infinite complacency, juniors went to and fro over this country, busy about their affairs.'

The St Teresa's U9 team had qualified for the semi-finals at Prestatyn in an exciting first round at RGS on 7th February, and everyone was looking forward to the next challenge, especially as an U11 team was entered into the Plate competition.

Richard Boddy of Newcastle Prep School kindly allowed us seats on their coach, and we all set off just before one. It may be unusual to mention motorway services, but Tebay on the M6 must rank as an outstanding example, with truly impressive organic food and award winning facilities; pop in and sample if you haven't already done so. After a smooth and enjoyable coach journey with a very friendly driver, we arrived at Pontins in the early evening. We were immediately struck by the playing area, similar in structure to a Roman gladiatorial arena, especially on Saturday morning when over 300 contestants took their seats, atmospheric tension rising. There were three rounds each day, with 50 (yes, fifty!) minutes on the clock for each player for every game, allowing ample time for the titanic battles across the board.

When not playing, the teams were able to sample the many activities available such as karting, bungee jumping and swimming. A talent show had been arranged on Saturday evening while for those who hadn't had enough chess there was a blitz event for adults and children alike. After seeing lots of excellent games played during the day, Tim Adams continued to fly the St Teresa flag in the handicap blitz, only losing to adult International Master, Lorin DeCosta.

It is both customary and justified to say how well the juniors fared, but both teams really gave outstanding performances, coming equal seventh in their respective competitions and the U9s claiming an excellent silver trophy and only one place away from a gold in a field of 24. Captain Daniel Bell, Aidan Byrne, Mark Broughton, Owen Bell, Sabrina Nzumbu and Stephanie Black all played magnificently. Sabrina won six out of six games, an extraordinary achievement considering she has only been playing at school for a limited time. The applause at the prize giving for the few players who had achieved this 100% score was well deserved.

The U11 captain, Jack Hughes, showed a mature assurance and steady nerve in the last round after cleverly engineering a draw in a seemingly lost

position, which gave him a very impressive 5.5 out of 6. Peter Black, Kate Garrett, Georgina Lobb, Chris Garney-Ward and Mia Ambelez displayed a tenacious commitment to tournament chess, which can only bode well for the future.

The school can be proud of all twelve players, and not just because of their chess; the concentration and overall behaviour of everyone sent out a clear message that St Teresa's is a school to be proud of. Organiser Tony Corfe made special mention of chess in the North East and lets hope the performances of all the local schools encourage others to participate.

We would like to thank the teachers, parents and children from Newcastle who helped to make it a special weekend, but as everyone knows, none of this would have happened without the tireless dedication and forward thinking of Head Teacher John Harrison. We wish him a prompt and complete recovery.

Abi & Tim Adams