



Leicester & District: Trophy win for Park

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A local event, if not unique then highly unusual, is the Rose Johnson Challenge Trophy organised by the Leicestershire Association that I believe is the oldest competition in this area which, in its early years, went through a couple of changes before settling down to the present format around 50 years ago – that of handicapped teams of four playing each of the opposition one game up to 21, making 16 games in all.

The games themselves are off scratch, in this the teams are handicapped by combining the gradings from the four individuals, averaging them out, and then applying a start in points for the lower rated team. With points a premium it is always a case of every point counts.

In the final this season Knighton Park faced Syston Casuals, the latter having two players from at least Division Two as well as two from Division Five, while KP had all four “middle of the road” from Division Three who formed a team in the league full of camaraderie that featured prominently in a match that started all square.

The first four games finished with the Park four points to the good, almost par, a feature being some excellent play by Tracey Smith who beat Division One’s John Szostak 21–18. Smith went on to record a plus score of 19 points, losing only to Ian Wetherly near the end when the match was all but over.

Martin Pember and Chris Parmar–Saville offered good support for Smith by themselves finishing on a positive note at, respectively, plus 14 and plus 4, while Simon Aldis recovered extremely well from two heavy defeats earlier to come close to parity after being minus 22 after two games. The Park eventually took the match 283–252 with the final game not played.

Wetherly, from Division Two, had battled away to win all four for Syston to post the best performance of the match at plus 20, while Szostak finished plus 8. Scott Morris and Tony Monteiro found their opponents all in good form as well as finding the difference between the divisions, three and five, tough to bridge. It was a match played in the very best of spirit and sportsmanship.

There are several awards made by the Leicester & District League each season, one of them to the player with

the greatest rise in grading. At one time only those who had played two consecutive seasons could win this but now there can be a gap, providing the player has an official mark from two or three seasons back.

One player who must come very close to winning this time is Tom Phipps of Blaby and Whetstone. Phipps came back last season after a break of a few years and struggled in Division Four for a grading of 82. A season in Division Five has worked wonders as he finished on 76% this term with a grading increase which must be approaching 50, certainly he will be in the high 120s.

Phipps' closest rivals both had a season off last term and have come back with a bang. Favourite to take the award is Lucky Obi of Knighton Park who started the season with a grading of 165 before scoring 81% in Division Two. This makes his new mark approximately 218, an increase of 53 points, around 60% improvement from the point of view of averages.

Guo Jianglong (Unicorn) was on a mark of 136 at the start of this term, he also played in the second division and ended at 52% which is around the 183 mark, an increase of 47. All three have made marked improvements and it will be interesting which one is finally top when the official gradings are released.

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