

2024 Norwich Bar Billiards AGM

Wednesday 13th December, 20:00. Venue - White Lion

Changes to Teams

- The Flamers - new team playing at the Coach and Horses. Represented in person by Algar who will be the captain. His contact number is available on request
- Dad's Army - change of venue, confirmed to be playing at The Marlborough Arms (previously at The Rose).
- Lionhearts - change of team name (previously White Lion Manes).
- Vikings - change of captain. This is now Malcolm Dennis,

Formats

- Confirmation of the league structure. As standard, each team will play every other team in their division twice across the season, once at their home venue and once away at the opponent's venue. Makeup of the divisions are as follows:

Division 1	Division 2
Black Stars	Cottagecore
Coach & Horses	Disasterfarians
Dad's Army	Flamers
Golden Stars	Lionhearts
International Brigade	The Rose
King's Head	Vikings
Serengeti	White Lions

It was noted by Dave (Black Stars) that there is a good variety of venues in each division this season, with 5 venues in Division 1 and 6 venues in Division 2.

- Debate on the structure of the Cup and Plate competitions. Due to the increase in the number of teams, different proposals were put forward. In short these were:
 1. 2 groups of 3 teams, 2 groups of 4 teams. Teams play all over teams in their group once. The group winners go through to the semi-finals of the Cup, which thereafter follows a straight knockout format. The group runners-up go through to the semi-finals of the Plate, which thereafter follows a straight knockout format. Teams which finish third or below in their group are eliminated.
 2. A straight knockout tournament with 7 first round matches. The winners progress to the quarter-finals of the cup where - following a random draw - one of these teams is given a bye and automatically progresses to the semi-finals. The same arrangement happens in the plate with the 7 losing teams from the first round.
 3. A straight knockout tournament with 7 first round matches. The winners, along with the 'best' losing team (to be determined by frame difference, then score difference if necessary) progress to the Cup quarter-finals. The 6 remaining teams who lost in the first round progress to the Plate quarter-finals. From here, the 3 winning teams from these matches, plus the 'best' losing team in this round progress to the Plate semi-finals.

A short period of discussion amongst the teams was called at this point. Following this, option 2 was quickly ruled out. Interesting points were raised around the relative fairness of the remaining options. It was noted that under either structure, a team is guaranteed to play at least two games and neither would be a 'dead rubber'. An alternative proposal of two groups consisting of seven teams was put forward by Adam (Dad's Army), which garnered some support but was ultimately deemed too difficult to fit in the timescales, or too complicated to organise in a 'Swiss' format.

A vote was called on the remaining options (1 and 3). By approximately 20 to 12, option 1 was found in favour, retaining a similar Cup and Plate format to previous seasons.

Other Agenda Points

- Following yet another calendar year without an official Singles Tournament, it was first asked to those in attendance whether there was an appetite to see it return (which there overwhelmingly is), and whether the idea of running it concurrently with the league season is reasonable (the response was positive).

One idea was put forward by Oli (International Brigade), namely to open entries initially to people who do not currently play in the league, and then to invite league players afterwards if needed to fill out a tournament. This was to encourage new players who may be intimidated by the idea of playing league-standard players, and to potentially allow teams to speak to these new players. While no decision has been made on the logistics of the singles tournament, this idea was met with some concern regarding the openness of such a tournament. However, anything which encourages people to play the game should be regarded as a positive.

At any rate, Dave (Black Stars) said that communication would be made in a few weeks regarding the Singles Tournament.

- Julian, landlord of the Lidgate Star (near Newmarket) was in attendance. They have recently acquired a billiards table and would like to encourage all from within the league to visit the pub. There are now two teams playing there and any groups or teams looking to play a match with those, or just have a practice would be welcomed and food etc will be supplied. This was met very positively.

There followed a short break.

Rule Updates

- Oscar (Lionhearts) as the landlord of the White Lion had proposed a change to the cancellation period. Specifically, the rule stated that if a team wished to cancel an arranged fixture, they had until 12:00pm on the day of the fixture in which to do so without incurring a penalty. Oscar said that this was too restrictive from the pub's point of view as there has been food prepared and extra staffing considerations.

Following discussions, it was agreed by all that the deadline should be pushed back to two days prior. Particularly, for a match due to be played on a Wednesday, any cancellation should be arranged before the end of Monday.

- Various people had raised the ever-recurring issue of the '5 player rule'. This essentially states that while a team should make all intentions to play a fixture with at least 6 players, there is no penalty imposed for having 5 players on the night. The penalties for having fewer than 5 players for a fixture were defined at the 2023 AGM, as were the arrangements for how to decide who would play extra frames in the event of having fewer than 6 players. Concerns around the rule centred on whether some teams did, or potentially could, intend to fulfil fixtures with just their best 5 players in order to maximise their chances of winning anathema to the spirit of the league.

Adam (Dad's Army) suggested whether a limit on the number of the times across the season a team could play with 5 players or fewer. After discussions, this was deemed to potentially be unfair for teams

who do genuinely struggle to find enough players, and that any punishments would have to be decided in advance.

Sharpie (White Lions) spoke about the relaxed nature of the league and how team captains should be able to feel free to raise concerns directly with the league organisers. He also said that he has struggled to have sufficient players on a given night but has drafted pub-goers at the last minute, who have ended up being regular players.

Magic Man (Cottagecore) said that his team struggle for numbers, and if there were strict impositions on the 5 player rule that his team would probably not be in a position to play in the league.

Dave (Black Stars) suggested that the number of matches played by teams with fewer than 6 players could be used as a form of tie-breaker in the end of season standings.

Ultimately it was decided that the rule is serving its purpose and that teams should raise concerns on a case-by-case basis. The rule does not appear to be abused on a regular basis.

- The 'final shot' situation was raised again. Currently if there is only one ball remaining and the two players have scores within 200 points of each other (400 if the red ball is remaining), a shot must be played off a side-cushion and can score in either the 200 or 100 hole to finish the frame. However, the issue is that the player who is leading, if they have an opportunity to play this shot, can aim to knock the 100 peg over whilst potting the ball in the 100 hole. Colloquially, this is deemed easier than playing the ball into the 100 hole without knocking over the peg and has no risk of knocking over the 200 peg, which would result in an immediate loss. As noted by Adam (Dad's Army), is the current rule reasonable in that a player could win a frame whilst committing a foul?

Dave (Black Stars) said we could perform some empirical testing in order to determine how difficult each of the potential final shots are, which may lead us to understand if purposeful fouling is occurring.

Emma (Serengeti) asked whether this is even an issue anyway. In her experience, this situation of going for the 100 shot is very rare due to the relative difficulty compared to the 200 shot.

Sharpie (White Lions) reminded everyone that the referee's discretion is still at play in this situation, and they have the power to call a deliberate foul.

Things got *somewhat* heated for a bit, but then it was decided to keep the existing rule as it is.

AOB

- The issue of deadlines for the League and Cup/Plate seasons were brought up. Currently there are deadlines for which all fixtures should be completed by and scoresheets returned. These are mostly adhered to, although extensions are granted on an ad-hoc basis. The question brought up was, should these be enforced more firmly?

Nathan (Lionhearts) said that if we were to be stricter, any penalty would need to be agreed at this meeting. Further, that the Cup/Plate deadline only affects the two teams in the finals, whereas extensions in the league may allow a team to have information about what they need to achieve in order to avoid relegation, reach promotion or the like.

Dave (Black Stars) noted that there could be situations where it is advantageous not to play a game, for instance if the top two teams in the division had to play each other as the final fixture, it could be beneficial for the team in first to refuse to play in order to maintain their standing.

Adam (Dad's Army) asked whether the flexibility shown last year can be used in future, as they had many individual circumstances which caused fielding a team to be very difficult.

Overall the consensus was that the current arrangements work well enough and that the end-of-season timeliness was kept at a good standard last year.

- In the discussion above, Adam (Dad's Army) mentioned the idea of a captain's Whatsapp chat. By this point, the chair of the meeting (Dave, Black Stars) had gone for a comfort break so Nathan (Lionhearts) took the helm and opened discussion on this idea. The consensus was that this would be useful both for official announcements and reminders, as well as for discussing issues which come up at matches. This chat should contain the league organisers (Dave and Phil, Black Stars) along with one representative from each of the teams.

- Nathan (Lionhearts) suggested that, following on from its introduction the previous season, a fee of £10 per team should be paid to the organisers in order to compensate the time, effort and administration expenses incurred in the running of the season. All teams agreed to this and a collection pot was very quickly found.

Trophy Presentations

The following teams were presented with their trophies for their success in the respective competitions of the 2023 season:

- Division 2 winners - Serengeti
- Division 1 winners - Golden Star
- Plate winners - International Brigade (it was noted that the losing finalist, Serengeti was accidentally engraved on the trophy. This has now been corrected.)
- Cup winners - Dad's Army

The Singles Tournament trophy was replaced by a new wooden design which has gone down well. As such, it is likely that the other trophies will be replaced this season too.

Finally a round of applause was given to the league organisers for their continued hard work and efforts.