

Phil Holt

It is once again my sad duty to report that Phil Holt of Olton Chess Club passed away on Sunday 6th November, after an extended illness. Condolences have been passed to Phil's family, especially his father, Trevor.

Phil's passing is especially tragic given his young age and the extraordinary talent that he has shown since joining the club as a child. His enthusiasm for the game and willingness to participate and help others will be particularly missed.

Phil showed extraordinary talent for chess at an early age and rose quickly to the Birmingham League first team, playing from time to time in Division 1. His extensive study and understanding for the game meant reaching grades in excess of 180 ECF relatively easily. Despite reaching the business end of the League, Phil continued to play in club tournaments, his favourite of which was the Olton Summer Tournament.

After leaving Solihull School, Phil went to UMIST in Manchester, studying Maths and German. Already taking part in County matches and tournaments, this gave the opportunity to experience different Leagues and involved a period of study in Germany. Returning to Birmingham, Phil was reaching the top boards at Olton and his grade was increasing.

When the club joined the Leamington League in 1993, Phil was instrumental in winning the LDCL Division 1 Championship at the first attempt and more than a dozen times since. Phil also largely cornered the Leamington League Lightning tournament. Another winner of that event, Mark Page of Kenilworth, has described Phil as the 'Big Dog' of the Leamington League and he was certainly not the person most top boards wanted to see walk into the room at Olton. A steady grade around the 200 ECF (2200 ELO) mark saw him compete in 4NCL matches for Warwickshire Select.

Phil became Olton's regular top board. His contribution to the team over the board was only matched by his knowledge when the team had an away match in some far-flung corner of the Midlands. Where to find the best beers and fish and chips and the best music to play on the CD player on the long car journey home.

Phil had an extensive knowledge of openings and opening traps, and for a long time was disparaging of players who did not start with 1. e4 as white – there was an amusing incident once when playing the late Joe Soesan. Joe shook hands, expecting e4, but Phil played d4 for the first time in competitive chess and Joe just sat there dumbfounded for around 5 minutes. Joe lost.

Phil continued to play in most Olton Summer tournaments and often a simul against up to 15 players in the club. He was always happy to play and help players of all strengths and produced many interesting games and articles for the Olton newsletter. Endgames were a speciality and he was always pleased to demonstrate, for example, the finer points of gaining the opposition or how to mate with K + B + N v K efficiently. He loved composing and solving puzzles.

Phil and Trevor have been regulars at many weekend congresses over the years, the old Bedworth congress being a particular favourite. They would discuss and analyse their games in detail and Phil would recall both his and his dad's games entirely from memory, Trevor has a flair for very attacking play right from the opening, often involving lots of sacrificing and ideal for weekend congresses. This was passed on to his son, but Phil combined tactical sharpness with a deep understanding of positional play. In short, Phil was an extremely talented and natural all-round chess player, for whom playing for a draw was

not in his nature and having to seal a move in Birmingham League matches was tantamount to an admission of defeat.

It is difficult to put into words the loss felt by the members of Olton Chess club and the wider chess community. Suffice to say that there will be a large void in the club following his passing.

Funeral details will be confirmed when known.

Richard Reynolds
Olton Chess Club

With thanks to Alan Lloyd (Division 1 team captain)