

The Bielski Cup

At the last Croydon and District Chess League 'Bielski Cup' team lightning tournament, held at CCF on March 1st 2019, a number of players asked 'who was Bielski?' This note aims to give an answer. Boleslaw 'Bob' Bielski (1926 – 1967) arrived in the UK after leaving Hungary, following the Soviet invasion in 1956. He was a strong player, and it was said at the time (though never confirmed) that he was related to the Hungarian GM Gedeon Barcza (1911 – 1986), who was eight times Hungarian Champion in the 1940s/60s. He was a man of few words, though mastered English well after his arrival.

Bob played on the top board for South Norwood CC in the sixties, and appeared regularly for Surrey County (between boards 10 and 25) from 1960 through to his last OTB game vs Kent in November 1965. He was in the County's correspondence team in 1966. In 1963 he appeared in the Grading List at 5a (equivalent to 180 today). *Surrey Chess News* of 16 January 1968 recorded his death: '*Shortly before going to print we learnt, with deep regret, of the death in December of B. Bielski...your Editor had played him only a fortnight earlier when he appeared to be in the best of health.*' He was only 41 when he died – but was known as a chain-smoker, at a time when smoking bans hadn't been invented, and ash-trays were standard issue between the boards.

South Norwood CC hosted the Croydon League's first lightning team tournament in January 1969 - though a 'Bielski Cup' isn't mentioned in the report of the event in *Surrey Chess News*. Five teams (two from South Norwood, two from Hayes in Kent, and one from Mushrooms) entered. At the beginning there was no grading limit, so with all its players around 200 or so Mushrooms 'carried all before them, winning their four matches 4-0, 4-0, 4-0, 3.5-0.5....'. The following year additional teams entered from Croydon, Morden, Redhill, and Sutton - and Mushrooms won again. The editor of the *Surrey Chess News* said: '*a special mention should be given to the one lady player present (Sue Roper of Croydon) who after losing her first game ('I really haven't played much lightning chess') proceeded to beat her remaining five opponents!*'.

In February 1971 the *Surrey Chess News* referred to the 'annual tournament for the **Bielski Cup**', and on that occasion it was won by 'a strong Richmond team'. A grading limit was soon imposed to encourage greater participation, and the 10-second buzzer was eventually replaced by ten, and five-minute guillotines, and most recently 3mins + 3 secs per move. Sponsored by the Croydon and District Chess League, the Bielski Cup has been a regular fixture in the local chess calendar ever since – though more than once freezing January weather has caused havoc: deterring travel or necessitating postponement to the Spring. The plinth records a few winners from more recent years.



CDCL May 2019 (with thanks to Martin Cath for personal reminiscences).