

Proposal to Update the League Ranking System

1. Introduction: Fairness and Game Theory (Nash Equilibrium if you like)

Fairness in competitive settings requires that teams are rewarded in proportion to their performance and that the ranking system does not inadvertently encourage strategic under-performance. Game theory evaluates whether a system is “incentive-compatible,” meaning that the optimal strategy for all teams is always to give full effort.

Ranking systems that contain thresholds or loopholes can unintentionally reward risk-avoidance or passive play once a goal has been secured. Chess leagues commonly use match-based scoring, treating the match result as the primary outcome, or board-based scoring, which evaluates the totality of performance across all boards.

From a fairness and game-theory standpoint, systems that reward every unit of performance tend to offer more accurate rankings and better incentives. This proposal compares the two methods and recommends a revised system for adoption.

2. Current League Results Under the Match-Point System (2–1–0)

Team	Played	W-D-L	For	Against	Points
Bristol Four Knights	5	5-0-0	17	3	10
Yate & Sodbury B	5	5-0-0	15	5	10
Bristol Cabot A	5	4-0-1	15.5	4.5	8
Bristol University C	5	2-1-2	8	12	5
Horfield & Redland E	5	1-0-4	7	13	2
Downend & Fishponds F	5	1-0-4	6.5	13.5	2
Bristol & Clifton F	5	1-0-4	6	14	2
Portishead B	5	0-1-4	5	15	1

3. Results Calculated by Board Difference (Normalised For – Against)

Team	For	Against	RD	NS
Bristol Four Knights	17	3	14	24
Bristol Cabot A	15.5	4.5	11	21
Yate & Sodbury B	15	5	10	20
Bristol University C	8	12	-4	6
Horfield & Redland E	7	13	-6	4
Downend & Fishponds F	6.5	13.5	-7	3
Bristol & Clifton F	6	14	-8	2
Portishead B	5	15	-10	0

RD = Raw Difference, NS = Normalised Score

Normalisation is simply adding the lowest score to each score, so as to avoid negative scores, in this case (minus) 10.

4. Pros and Cons of the Match-Point System

Advantages

- Avoids excessive pressure to run up large winning margins against weaker teams.

Disadvantages

- Threshold effect: once a team secures enough points to win the match, extra wins give no reward.
- Encourages draws or risk-averse play on remaining boards.
- Does not differentiate between narrow and decisive victories.
- Season-long rankings may misrepresent true team strength.

5. Pros and Cons of the Board-Difference System

Advantages

- Rewards performance on every board; fully incentive-compatible.
- Teams always benefit from playing competitively throughout the match.
- Provides a more accurate reflection of overall team strength.
- Reduces the incentive for early draws or passive play.

Disadvantages

- Can increase volatility in league tables; heavy losses weigh more heavily.
- May encourage stronger teams to maximise margins against weaker opposition..

6. Rationale for Change

The current match-point system does not consistently reward full performance and can create strategic distortions. A board-difference approach eliminates threshold effects, aligns incentives with actual competitive effort, and provides a clearer representation of team strength over the season. Comparing the current match-point table with normalised board-difference results highlights the improved fairness and accuracy of this method.

7. Proposal to the AGM

Adopt the following ranking criteria for the next season:

- Normalised board difference as the primary ranking measure.
- Total boards scored (For) as the secondary measure.
- Head-to-head results as the tertiary measure.
- Match points (2–1–0) retained only as a final tie-break.