

17 May 2010, by Jana Hricova

## **European Championship System**

### **1) Prerequisite for a new European Championship System (ECS)**

Two main conditions were formulated, which a new ECS has to fulfill.

A) European Championship (ECship) has to be played only by players with a nationality of EGF member countries.

The condition above was accepted by AGM 2009 in Groningen (NL) and as such has to be taken into account in every possible considered ECS.

B) European Go Congress Open Tournament has to be affected as little as possible.

The wish to keep Go Congress as an Annual Festival for as many go players from the whole world as possible, as an opportunity to meet people of various cultural background, as an opportunity to meet strong professional players from the far East, was expressed.

### **2) Possible systems how to play European Championship**

Two conditions above taken together limit very much possibilities for a new ECS. Let's study together main options. All of them were somehow considered by organisers and strong players, but without a detailed specification, just ideas.

A) Separate European Championship tournament run besides Open Tournament with a possibility for Europeans to play both tournaments. It look nice, but

- to run the Open tournament in the morning and ECship afternoon, for example, would affect time schedule of the Congress a lot,
- Open tournament would have to have shorter time for games (at least for top groups) as it has today; many players today like longer thinking time, not only top players,
- it is doubtful if top European players would play the Open tournament besides the ECship. It would be very demanding to play two difficult games daily instead of one and a quality of the play would go down in a such case for sure. At least, some of top players wouldn't play Open for sure, so Open tournament would be deprived of several top Europeans anyway.

B) Separate big European Championship tournament for top European players without option to play Open Tournament

- such a tournament, regardless of how the players selection for ECship would be done, would spoil the Open tournament for sure. The Open tournament would lose its attraction for strong non-European players, and as a result for many Europeans as well.

C) Separate European Championship for a small group of top European players without option to play Open Tournament

- an advantage is clear: if only a few players would be taken from the Open tournament, the Open still would keep its value,
- disadvantage seems also to be clear: only very few players could play European Championship and not every country would be represented. It seems to be a little bit unfair for the first sight, but if we have a look at the ECS today, it has been working like that already for many years.

**To evaluate C) option properly, let's study current system without emotion first.**

Today, only 24 European top players, according to the current rating and regardless of their

nationality, are chosen to play in a top MacMahon group and have an actual chance to fight for the title and top positions in a final standing list. If we have a look at results of last ECships, we can see that top (European) places at any Congresses were always won by best European players who participated at the particular Championship. Well, it happened sometimes, that a weaker player defeated a stronger one, but apparently it usually affected much more a final result of the stronger player, than the weaker one. E.g. the stronger player had worse side criteria for a final standing than other strong players comparable to him, while the weaker winner, in spite of his win, usually did not have enough wins to finish among the best Europeans at the end. There is a big difference between 'to defeat one strong player at the tournament' and between 'to defeat strong players regularly at the tournament'. It is very probable, that if we take several of these top players, who would normally be included into top MacMahon group, and let them play together in a separate group, the same three - four players would be at the top as if they played in the Open tournament. Why then we should make a separate group? Well, today, even if we can guess which group of Europeans will be the best as a whole, their final standing is a lottery which depends on how many Asian players they meet and in which rounds, etc. Side criteria very often decide European Champion (EC) by a little bit strange way. For example:

- 2009 – Dinerstein became EC on SOS before Taranu despite he lost to Taranu,
- 2008 – Taranu became EC on SOS before Dinerstein, they did not play together,
- 2007 – Shikshin became EC on SOSOS before Dinerstein despite he lost to him.

It is very probable, that if Europeans play only among themselves, the final standing will be more fair.

### Let's study possibilities for C) option

- If we agree, that C) option is very close to the current system and want to think about it seriously, we should first clear up disadvantages caused by a total separation of the top players playing for the title. First of all, it might seem to be a bit unfair to reserve ECship only for top 'n' Europeans. Many countries, even if their players do not occupy top positions, need to have them on a final list of ECship because of the promotion and support of go in their home countries. Nevertheless, that problem can be easily solved. For example, if we join together a final list of 'Top n' group with a final list of the Open tournament. First European from the Open would be 'n+1' in ECship, etc. Of course a final standing of Europeans in the Open will again be influenced by non-Europeans, but again, best Europeans in the Open will be very probably among best placed Europeans in the tournament, and the difference between 'n+1' and 'n+2' is generally not so much important as between 1 and 2.
- Next question to be solved is, how many players should play in a top group for the title. Some possibilities are discussed bellow.
  - I. A selection is simple today. 24 best players according to the current rating play in the top MacMahon group. We can simply accept this procedure and let 24 best players who will come for EGC to play a separate tournament. The system is very simple. The drawback is, that 24 is quite a lot of players and the Open tournament would be affected by withdrawing such a big number of top players a lot.
  - II. We select less than 24 players. We should also consider how they will play. Twelve might be a good number. There are two advantages for that. Twelve are not as many as their selection would affect the Open tournament badly. Also, twelve seems to be the highest number of players for whom *round robin* system could be playable. Round robin system is considered to be the best=fair system how to select the European Champion by many people.
 

How to choose 12 players?

    - i. We can choose, as today, 12 best players according to the current rating who come for EGC. Disadvantage of this selection is, that ratings of top players are quite stable and do not change very quickly. We might expect with a high probability, that almost the same players would play for the title every year. That wouldn't be attractive too much and as a result, a lot of objections could be expected against such a selection procedure, and consequently against the system as a whole. Nevertheless, twelve players selected according to the current rating might be a good initial setting for the first year.
    - ii. We will develop a more sophisticated system for a selection of players for EGC. One possibility, how to select players can be as bellow:

- n1 best players from the top group in a previous year (best players from the top group should deserve to be seated automatically to the top group in the next year).
- n2 best players from the Open tournament in a previous year (that selection of the best players from the Open tournament will secure, that players playing for the title will not be the same every year and also, the Open tournament will be more attractive for other European players).
- n3 players will be given a wild card by EGF. A wild card is necessary. It might happen that a strong player will not be able to participate one year on the Championship, because of the illness or any other important reason, and he/she would be, as a result, automatically excluded from the chance to play for the title next year. There might be given some conditions, which a player must fulfill if he/she is to be awarded a wild card. For example, a wild card can be awarded only to a player, who was unable to participate at the last ECship, and a his/her rating is at least 2550 (6 dan minimum).
- Let's  $n1+n2+n3 = 9$ . We will have maximum 9 players (somebody might not come) given by the selection procedure above. The rest up to 12 will be chosen out of the present players according to the current rating.

The system described above is just one suggestion for a discussion. Nevertheless, it is not only a proposed system itself. It is also a list of problems (maybe not complete) which must be considered, if we want to have a stable and working system. It is also an analytical schema, how we should think about the system, if we want to come to the reasonable conclusion on European Championship System.

### **Round Robin System, advantages and disadvantages**

- Advantages.

It is the fairest system how to select the best player from a small group of players, and not only the best player. It is also a way how to make a fair final standing for a small group of players as a whole.

- Disadvantages

It may not decide the Champion uniquely. If three players defeat each other in a circle and win the rest of their games, there will be no side criteria which could decide the Champion. As a result, we will have to decide if we really need a single Champion. If yes, then an additional match among the best three is necessary. It might be a problem to play such an additional match on reasonable terms and finish it in time, during the Congress. On the other hand, how much probable is such a situation and do we really need a unique Champion? If we have a look at other sports, to share a place is possible in many sports, when the result is the same. In fact, we need a unique final standing much more for a decision how to select European representatives for World tournaments, than for the necessity to have a unique Champion. A final standing at European Championship should be taken into account first for this selection, of course, but if the Champion is not decided uniquely, than additional 'qualification' match can be played after the Championship and there would be no problem with a tough timetable at the Congress. Also, the other option is, if the result is the same, higher rating can be taken into account to decide representatives.

It is necessary to consider all of these possibilities with all consequences, and then come to the conclusion which is acceptable for majority.