

Bimonthly Magazine for the Association of British Scrabble Players

OnBoard

ISSUE 188
JUNE 2020

**ABSP
PERSONALITY:
Chris Cummins**

**How online
tournaments
are making
up for the
real thing**

**LOCKDOWN SHOWDOWN!
South Africa takes on
the United Kingdom**



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HIGHLIGHTS

2

PERSONALITY
Chris Cummins



6

WORDS
David Sutton

10

SA vs UK
ISC tournament



16

EDEN VALLEY
Martin Fagan

20

GREEK SCRABBLE
Thrasos Myrsinis



24

SCRABBLE GO
Chris Hawkins

CONTENTS IN FULL ...

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Editorial & Contributors | 16 Eden Valley Tournament | 26 Word Perfect |
| 2 ABSP Personality | 18 ISC Strikes Back | 27 Obituary: Temu Oluku |
| 5 Anagrid & Cryptogram 1 | 19 Scrabble in Greece | 28 Dusting off the Archives |
| 6 Weird & Wonderful Words | 22 Duplicate in Lockdown | 29 Staying in Touch |
| 10 ISC Clash of the Titans! | 24 Scrabble GO | 30 Cryptic Crossword Puzzle |
| 14 The Importance of Blanks | 25 Anagrid & Cryptogram 2 | IBC Solutions |

MEET THE TEAM



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As you might have seen, although the ABSP committee decided to suspend production of the print version of *OnBoard* for the time being, the magazine will continue in its electronic form — so welcome to this June issue! It is, perforce, slimmer than usual, with many of the regular items missing, but many thanks to all those who contributed. Look out for articles by Chris, Chris, and Chris! — and an interesting one about the Scrabble scene in Greece. Undeterred by either floods or the coronavirus, Eden Valley went ahead with its first tournament just before lockdown, so we have news of that, as well as reports on an ISC battle between the UK and SA (ISC really has come into its own recently, as you will see!), plus an ongoing Duplicate tussle. Enjoy your read, and please do submit your contributions to: editor@absp.org.uk

Editorial

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I'm 36 years old, originally from Surrey, and for the past seven years I've lived in Edinburgh. My work brought me here, but I'm very glad that it did — it's a wonderful place to live, and also benefits from a lively and sympathetic Scrabble community. Before Edinburgh, I spent two years in Bielefeld, in Germany, a city which is pleasant enough in its way, but most famous for the manufacture of frozen pizzas and for an Internet meme asserting its non-existence, so this does feel like something of a step up.

Like many people here, I have a long-standing interest in wordplay and puzzles, and I'm fortunate to have stumbled into a line of work which exploits some of my otherwise largely useless abilities in this area: I teach and research linguistics at the University of Edinburgh. I do this despite being embarrassingly deficient in foreign language skills — I can tell you things *about*, say, Mandarin, but I can't tell you things *in* Mandarin. Lynne Murphy once said that asking a linguistics researcher how many languages they speak is like asking a doctor how many diseases they have, but I'm not sure how far we should push that analogy.

I've been playing Scrabble since I was five or thereabouts — with my parents and grandmother, initially adjudicated by the tiny Collins Gem dictionary and later moving with a clunk to OSW (goodbye, meanings) — and played at the Cambridge club from 2002 to 2011. I went to very few tournaments in those days, but have somewhat made up for that in recent years, thanks to the proliferation of events within easy reach of Edinburgh. And I've occasionally ventured further afield, although no further than Torquay as yet.

What I enjoy most about Scrabble is the constant novelty: there's always something new to be found in a game, and (up to a point) the more you learn the richer in possibilities it gets. I don't tend to think about the games much after the fact, and



ABSP PERSONALITY

Chris Cummins

He's a seasoned TV quiz show participant (and survived to tell the tale!), he's an academic, he enjoys travel — and, of course, he's one of our top Scrabble players.

Chris chats to *OnBoard* about his varied life

perhaps as a result I remember very few in any detail: at the Edinburgh club, Colin Nicol is a far more authoritative source on my Scrabble life than I am. One move that does spring to mind is an outplay of SUBITIZE against Ross Mackenzie at the Scottish Round Robin in 2015, as it's a word that's highly relevant to some of my research (and it scored 227, which was a nice extra).

I've also enjoyed watching TV quiz shows from an early age, and have accumulated quite a few appearances over the years. *Countdown* was perhaps the most successful – I had a lucky series win in 2003, back in the days before online play when the standard was not as high as it is now (and the lexicon not so idiosyncratic). I didn't have much confidence in my word power then either, and it hadn't occurred to me that it would be worth studying for, so my strategy was to try to hang on through the letters games and edge away on the numbers. What really struck me during the finals was the level of hostility between some of the contestants, hence my primary aim was to be relatively inoffensive, which I think I managed in the green room, although the TV audience may not have agreed.

I applied for *Countdown* on the rebound from a failed *University Challenge* audition: a couple of years later I did get onto the show, but that was a stressful and chaotic experience for reasons that had nothing to do with the content of the show (9am starts on a Saturday have never boded well for me), and the best thing I can say about it is that I'm still talking to at least some of my team.

On the other hand, my other team quiz appearance was my favourite TV experience so far, *Only Connect* (back in the BBC4 days) – no budget, no hype, interesting questions, and teammates to blame for being unable to answer them.



Facing page: Chris received the trophy for the 2019 edition of the Forth League, at this year's Scottish Round Robin.

Top: A cartoon featuring the Bielefeld conspiracy, on display at Bielefeld University. "We are all in on the joke," says Chris.

Bottom: The most remote location his work has ever taken him: teaching at a summer school in Sommarøy, northern Norway, in 2016





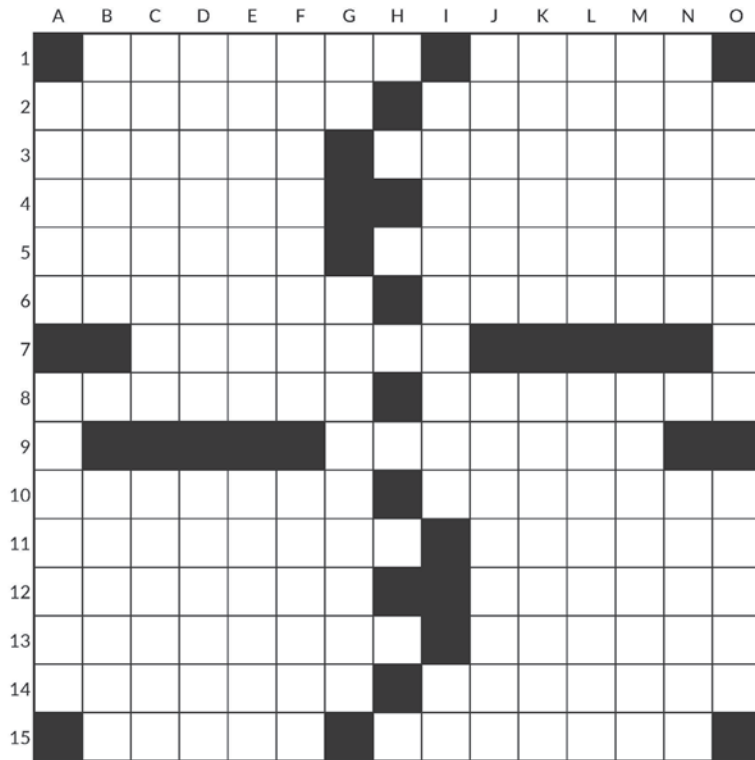
On balance, I would definitely recommend TV quizzing — although this is perhaps a vacuous sentiment, as I have the impression that most people reading this have already been on them. For those of you who haven't, think of it as like a two-day tournament but with someone else paying for travel and accommodation.

Of course, there are dangers. You might become the object of a fantasy developed by a disturbed *Countdown* viewer. You might be recognised on an overnight ferry by a stag party going to Amsterdam who think it would be an excellent idea to bring you with them to check the bar bills, handcuffed to the groom if necessary. Worst of all, Carol Vorderman might tell the viewing audience that you remind her of Boris Johnson. Fortunately, time is a great healer. ☐

Top: Chris's preferred location when not working or playing Scrabble: Croatia, 2012.
Bottom left: In a classic academic environment, 2008!
Bottom right: One board Chris did take a photo of: 2015 Scottish Round Robin. EASELESs was Ross's nine-timer
Cover picture: Chris in Krakow, Poland, in 2018



Anagrid & Cryptogram 1



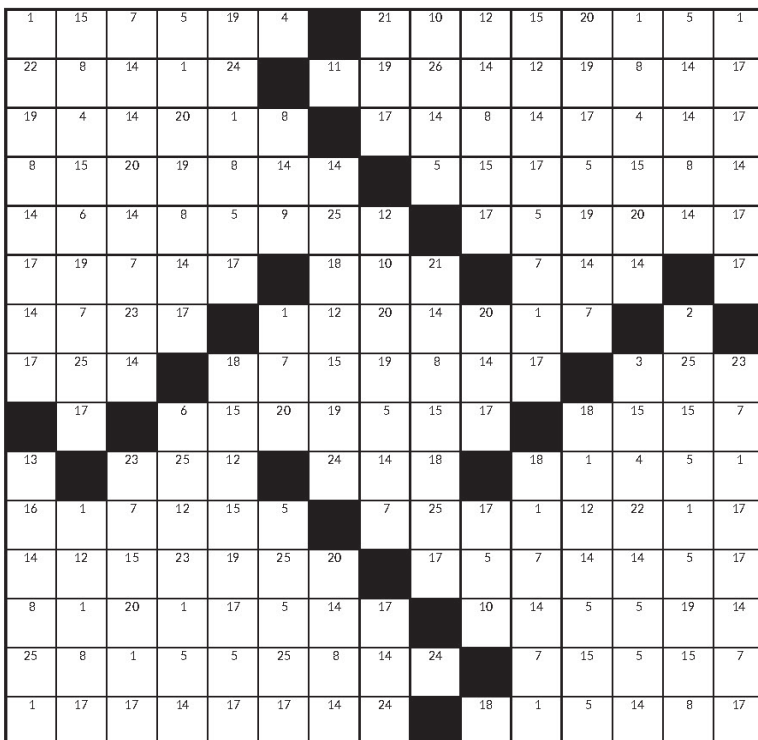
Anagrid clues

HORIZONTAL CLUES

1. TREEFIS – SNEET
2. STRUGET – NOONIES
3. CILIAI – LATTERAN
4. TOSSTH – ORALICE
5. MICAEL – TEEVUTFA
6. TOMLASS – SERRPES
7. EEEEEPTS
8. SZETTES – COHABID
9. NITLIKE
10. GRAYADE – SAARGLI
11. TREEAEEM – EKNIUS
12. STREVII – EDGINS
13. OCTELRII – ETAISM
14. NITLESS – NITSTAS
15. SEaed – EATNESS

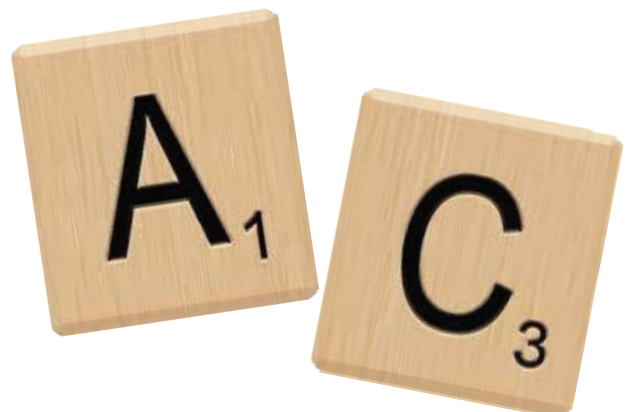
VERTICAL CLUES

- a. MIGSS – WEESTRY
- b. HUMLAF – MAALIE
- c. AIOLETTE – LEEVRI
- d. TELETATS – DEEDIC
- e. SCITETTE – ENRAIS
- f. SPRIOICE – STATIG
- g. ETSOTSETS
- h. -
- i. GLISPLAIN
- j. OORNUT – SCAMLANS
- k. NEEVRE – UNRIDISH
- l. ESIOTR – ESKAINAI
- m. TECSAN – ESKAIBTE
- n. TEESAN – ITLAEG
- o. TREEDSE – TENSS



Find the solutions on the inside back cover of this issue!

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13													
				T																					
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26													
	O																								



weird & wonderful WORDS

ONISCOID *(probability 17075)*

ONISCOID means 'like a woodlouse', from the Greek *oniskos*, a diminutive of *onos*, ass. It's a nice word, but of limited applicability, since not much is like a woodlouse except another woodlouse. Many animal words — LEONINE, EQUINE, FELINE, AQUILINE, ASININE, even ELEPHANTINE — can be transferred to human characteristics, but there doesn't seem much chance of getting ONISCOID into the conversation unless, say, your spouse has a tendency to curl up in a ball when prodded, and roll away into a dark corner.

There are of course many other rather specific taxonomical terms. ALCIDINE relates to auks, LEPORINE to hares, OSCINE or OSCININE to songbirds, PAVONINE to peacocks, PICINE to woodpeckers, RANINE to frogs, BUBALINE to a particular genus of antelope, SCIURINE to squirrels, SORICINE to shrews, VESPINE to wasps, PARDINE to leopards and XENURINE to a genus of armadillos. Less usefully from the Scrabble point of view, ARVICOLINE refers to water-voles and DIDELPHINE to opossums.

While on the subject of words of great precision but limited applicability, let me leave you with my favourite: MYRISTICIVOROUS, which means 'feeding on nutmegs'. Disappointingly, this refers not to the latest fad among waif-thin supermodels, but to certain humming-birds.





In this issue,
David Sutton
brings us
creepy-
crawlies,
an alloy,
an Asian
animal,
an Irish
expression, and ...
well, that's censored!

ASTATINE is a chemical element, no. 85 in the Periodic Table. It is the rarest of all the naturally occurring elements: it is thought that any one time there is no more than one ounce of astatine on earth, making its nearest contender in the rarity stakes, FRANCIUM, look relatively abundant at 20 ounces or so.

Here's a little test: write down as many names of chemical elements as you can (there are 118 in all). If you manage more than about 60, I suspect that you are either a professional chemist or very good at memorising the words of Tom Lehrer songs. I have been brushing up my own knowledge by reading Sam Kean's *The Disappearing Spoon*, a book crammed with fascinating lore about the elements along with anecdotes about their sometimes-eccentric discoverers. Here are a few notes on shorter names that may be less familiar to you.

THULIUM is element 69, a rare earth or lanthanide. It is impossible to obtain completely pure THULIUM; it is always contaminated by other rare earth elements.

CERIUM, element 58, is another lanthanide. It sparks when struck, making it ideal for use as flints in cigarette lighters. It kept the Jewish writer Primo Levi alive when he was working in a prison chemical plant during the Holocaust – he would appropriate small sticks of cerium and barter them with civilians for bread and soup.

THALLIUM, element 81, is considered the deadliest element in the table. It replaces potassium in the body, causing massive damage. The CIA are alleged to have plotted to assassinate Fidel Castro by powdering his socks with thallium-tainted talcum powder.

ASTATINE (probability 1361)

RHODIUM, element 45, is the most expensive of all the elements that can actually be bought commercially. It is strange to think that at one time this prestigious position was held by the now ubiquitous ALUMINIUM (or ALUMINUM), until someone figured out how to separate it from oxygen.

HAFNIUM, element 72, was not nailed down till 1922 when Niels Bohr, applying reasoning based on the principles of the new quantum physics, decided that the best place to look for it was in samples of ZIRCONIUM, and despatched two chemists to do that. They found it first time.

It is worth noting that many elements went through several names or proposed names before settling down to their present identities. ASTATINE, for example, was first proposed as ALABAMINE, after Alabama where it was first found; another early name for it was HELVETIUM. VIRGINIUM was proposed for FRANCIUM. PROMETHEUM was once called ILLINIUM. JOLIOTIUM is a former name for DUBNIUM. SILICON was originally called SILICIUM. TUNGSTEN has an alternative name WOLFRAM, and even TIN can be called STANNUM.

And let us not forget DIDYMIUM, NEBULIUM and CORONIUM, three elements that never were, being discoveries that turned out to resolve into existing elements. Some you win, some you lose ...

A LINSANG is a slender animal of Borneo and Java, looking like a cross between a cat and a large weasel; the name is also applied to related animals in the Himalayas and West Africa. It is actually neither cat nor weasel, being a VIVERRID, a member of the civet family, which includes several rather shy animals that are probably not very well known, at least in this country, along with one or two that have achieved more prominence through exposure in the media, like the MEERKAT (or MEERCAT), aka SURICATE, and the MONGOOSE or MUNGOOSE. (By the way, MONGOOSEES or MONGEES but only MUNGOOSEES not MUNGEESE*; MONGEES is an abomination anyway as the -GOOSE element has nothing to do with the bird, the name deriving from Marathi: *mangus*).

The less well-known members of the family include the BINTURONG of SE Asia (the name is Malay), the MUSANG (another Malay word), the DELUNDUNG or weasel cat of Java, taking its name from the Javanese, the RASSE, also from the Javanese, the ZIBET (or ZIBETH) and the GENET or GENETTE (French, but ultimately from the Arabic *jarnait*). African members of the family include the NANDINE or palm civet and the FOSSA or FOUSSA, Madagascar's largest carnivore (the plural of FOSSA is FOSSAS, but FOSSAE exists as a plural of FOSSA in the unrelated sense of an anatomical pit or depression).

Finally, should your opponent play PARADOX, you just might get the opportunity to extend it to PARADOXURE,

LINSANG (probability 11884)



another civet-like carnivore of southern Asia. Or even to PARADOXURINE, which sounds like a bladder complaint but is actually the adjective from PARADOXURE. If you really want to know, PARADOXURE comes from the Greek *para*, beyond, plus *oura*, tail, whereas PARADOX, the logical contradiction, comes from Greek *para*, beyond, plus *doxa*, opinion. So there is nothing paradoxical about the paradoxure.

OCCAMY (probability 21311)

OCCAMY is a name for a silvery alloy, a base imitation of silver and gold. The name is a corruption of the word alchemy, and has nothing to do with the programming language OCCAM, which takes its name from William of Occam or Ockham, the philosopher for whom Occam's razor is named.

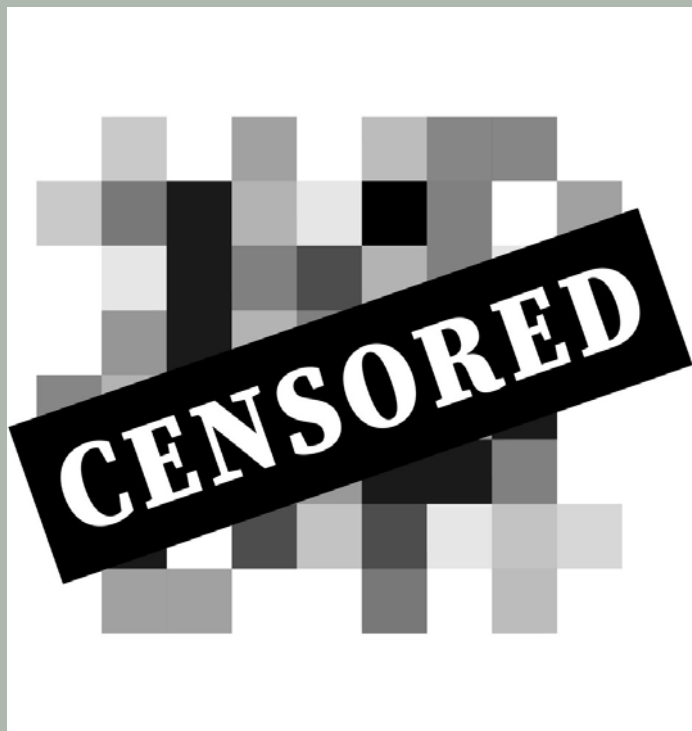
Alchemy has given us a number of other interesting words. There is, for example, SERICON, thought to be a red or black tincture, and BUFO, a black tincture, from Latin *bufo*, toad. AZOTH is the alchemist's name for mercury, an element that they regarded as particularly magical, and an ALEMBROTH was their name for the compound mercury ammonium chloride, also called salt of wisdom. ALKAHEST refers to the universal solvent sought by alchemists. An ATHANOR was a kind of furnace they used, and an ALUDEL was a pear-shaped pot used in sublimation.

An alchemist himself, or CHYMIIST, might also be called a SPAGERIST (or SPAGIRIST or SPAGYRIST), and the science of alchemy was sometimes called SPAGERICS (or SPAGIRICS or SPAGYRICS). These terms are thought to have been coined by Paracelsus, who was born Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, but found it wouldn't fit on the laboratory door. It was also Paracelsus who gave the name LAUDANUM to a tincture of opium, OPODELDOC to a kind of soap liniment used in medicine, NOSTOC to a kind of blue-green alga, and coined the familiar words SYLPH and GNOME.



POONTANG

(probability 20890)



Philip Larkin begins one of his poems with the lines 'Sexual intercourse began/In ninety sixty-three'. Even by the lax standards of factual compliance that are, alas, endemic to so much poetry, this is an extremely inaccurate statement, since biologists believe that sexual intercourse actually began about one and a half billion years ago. (The point of sex, in case you have ever stopped to wonder, and let's face it, not many of us do, is to create genetic diversity in a population, thus making it more adaptable to changing conditions).

Anyway, there has been plenty of time, both before Mr Larkin and since, for colloquial terms for the sexual act to make their appearance, and one of these is POONTANG. This is American slang, and derives from the French *putain*, whore.

Other terms relating to fornication include the Papuan KOAP, the British NOOKY, ROGER, SWIVE and RUMPO, and the Yiddish SHTUP, but surely the prize for euphony, if not for brevity, must go to the Scots HOUGHMAGANDIE (or HOCHMAGANDY), a word of uncertain origin.

There are, of course, many variations on the straight sexual act, but I will leave you to explore (lexically speaking, of course) the delights of GAMAHUCHE (or GAMARUCHE), FELLATIO, FROTTAGE, ANILINCTUS, TRIBADY (or TRIBADISM), and the rather unsatisfactory-sounding OUTERCOURSE.

MORYAH is an Irish interjection used to express annoyance or disbelief: it derives from the Irish Gaelic *mar dhea*, forsooth. I suspect that as a low-probability six with no hooks it is one of the least-known of the shorter words in the Scrabble lexicon, except, of course, among Irish Scrabble players, who doubtless mutter it to themselves all the time as yet another disastrous pickup makes its appearance on the rack.

There are several other Irish interjections well worth knowing, both from the Scrabble point of view and to equip you with a full range of expression should you ever visit Ireland. It is perhaps significant that most are expressive of surprise or consternation. Thus we have:

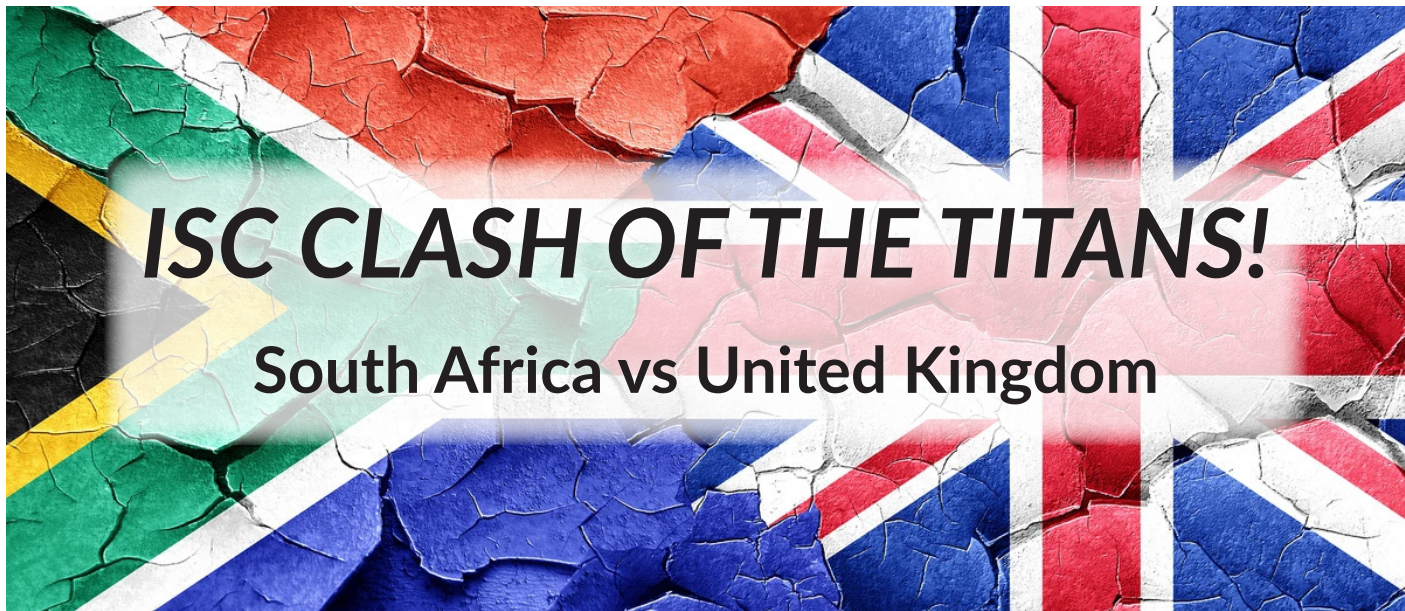
ARRAH	wonder or mild expostulation
BEGORAH	a mild oath, by God (variants BEGORRA, BEGORRAH)
BEJABERS	a mild oath, by Jesus
MUSHA	surprise
OHONE	lamentation (variant OCHONE)
WISHA	surprise

Surprisingly there is no BEGOB*, though in the mind of an Englishman this is inseparable from BEGORAH in characterising Irish idiom. Of course, as a tourist you should use these interjections sparingly. You don't want your hosts to think you are an ANGASHORE (a miserable whinger) given to OLOGOANING (loudly complaining) or to RAWMAISH (foolish or dissolute talk).

MORYAH

(probability 15401)





Part 1: The Victors

In April, a team of South African Scrabblers challenged ABSP members to an online duel. Representatives from the opposing teams – **Natalie Zolty** (UK) and **Steven Gruz** (SA) each give their own perspective of the bout

Moment of reckoning – Natalie Zolty

During these strangest of times, when playing the game we love face-to-face is no longer possible, the Internet Scrabble Club (ISC) has become a hub of activity and the place for us to ‘meet’ and compete across virtual boards. Not only have there been local tournaments and club nights, but also international events with national honour at stake.

Back in April, Llewellyn Jegels from South Africa laid down a challenge to Nicky Huitson: Assemble a team of ten of the UK’s finest Scrabblers to compete against our team from South Africa, to determine the better Scrabbling nation.

TD and tournament organiser James Burley took on the task of rallying our troops. Eventually, so many had turned down the invitation or been unavailable that I was asked to join the crew. 😊

The date was set: we would each play 20 games of Scrabble over the weekend of 19 and 20 April in a double Round Robin, making a total of 200 matches. Our elite team was headed up by two Grandmasters, Pauls Gallen and Allan, while Team SA included their 2019 national champion, mathematician Dr Harry Wiggins, and 2019 South African Masters winner Steven Gruz.

The full lineup:

Team UK	Team SA
Paul Gallen	Steven Gruz
Paul Allan	Harry Wiggins
Natalie Zolty	Llewellyn Jegels
Andy Goodwin	Solomon Lepotho
Stu Harkness	Neil Horne
Rik Kennedy	Howard Rayner
Bob Violett	Diana Mason
Chris Cummins	Ike Obidike
Colin Northmore	Gerald Davids
Chris Vicary	Andrew Goldberg

Scrabble Showdown on ISC This Weekend

Schedule uses UK time

Saturday	Sunday
11.45 Game 1	11.35 Game 11
12.20 Game 2	12.10 Game 12
12.55 Game 3	12.45 Game 13
13.30 Game 4	13.20 Game 14
14.05 Game 5	13.55 Game 15
Break	Break
15.00 Game 6	14.50 Game 16
15.35 Game 7	15.25 Game 17
16.10 Game 8	16.00 Game 18
16.45 Game 9	16.35 Game 19
17.20 Game 10	17.10 Game 20

Follow Live at:
www.twitch.tv/evil_budgie

Although we have been unable to meet for over two months now, in many ways the UK Scrabble community is more connected than ever, with people having more time to interact, and many online events taking place. Team UK assembled on Facebook Messenger on Saturday morning for some team talk and anagramming practice before the first round tiled off at 11:45am.

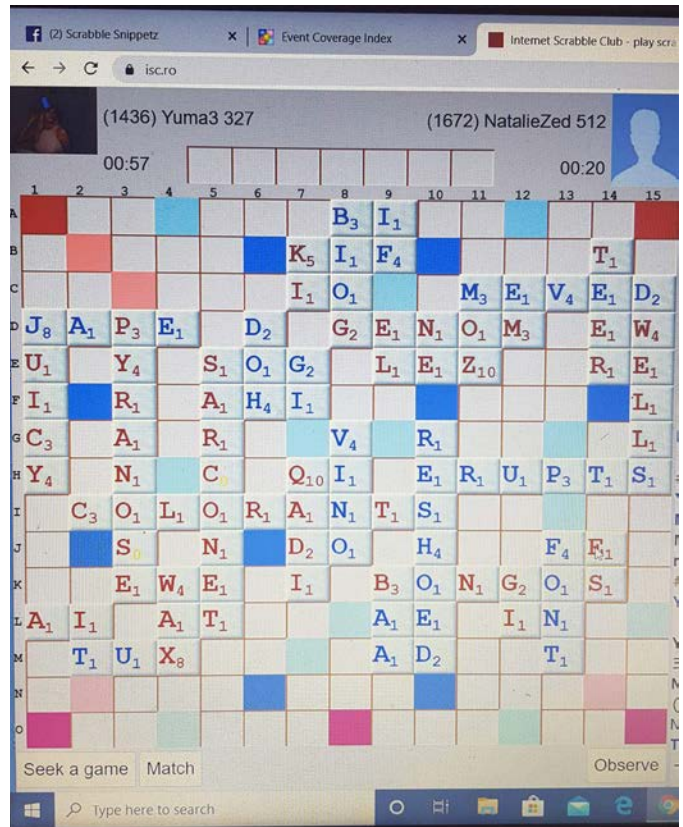
There was a great camaraderie, with us being cheered on by Nicky Huitson, and with Craig Beavers providing streaming and commentary throughout the weekend on his Twitch channel. Despite some initial nerves and stumbles, by lunchtime Team UK were leading 33 games to 14.

The standard was as high as might be expected for such illustrious players, with gems such as TURBONDS, SEXTING, ROUPIT, GOMUTO, ELUVIUMS, PYRANOSE and more.

With 200 matches in total, we needed to reach the magic number of 101 wins to secure victory. After 15 rounds we were leading 94-56 with Paul Allan ahead on 13-2 from Paul Gallen in second place. Edinburgh's Chris Cummins had a disappointing first day but rallied on the second and, among much jubilation, clinched the all-important win that took Team UK over the line with 39 games still to play. The final score was Team UK 129, Team SA 71, with Paul Gallen the individual winner and the UK clinching the top five spots.

Llewellyn was magnanimous in congratulating the team on what had been a fantastically fun weekend. So, who can we take on next? We are hoping to find a date soon for a match against a team from the US (or as Nicky said, "Who's up for whooping ass against the USA?"). Watch this space!

Full results can be found on Centrestar at <http://centrestar.co.uk/tsh/UKSAApril2020/html/>



Above: Screenshot of a game between Natalie Zolty of the UK and Diana Mason of SA

Below: Another game screenshot, and the point at which Team UK secured their victory with a comfortable margin of 101 wins to SA's 60. The eventual tally was 129-71 in the UK's favour

101-60
First to 100.5 wins

rated noescape=ON challenge=5-PO
UNOBSERVE
You are no longer observing gera
OBSERVE NatalieZed
You are now observing: NatalieZe
noescape=ON challenge=5-POINTS.
* taghairm leaves the Internet S
* taghairm joins the Internet Sc
UNOBSERVE
You are no longer observing Nata
OBSERVE Yracivc
You are now observing: Madimetja vs Yracivc SOWPODS 15 0 ra
noescape=ON challenge=5-POINTS. Yracivc's turn.
Yracivc: MOVE 15N yu 21
UNOBSERVE
You are no longer observing Madimetja vs Yracivc.
OBSERVE aphasiac
You are now observing: aphasiac vs Yuma3 SOWPODS 15 0 rated
noescape=ON challenge=5-POINTS. Yuma3's turn.

Part 2: The Vanquished

Lockdown showdown – Steven Gruzd

There is never a good time for a pandemic, unless it covers two triples in Scrabble.

COVID-19 hit South African Scrabble at a particularly unfortunate time. New leadership had prioritised growing the game from the start of 2019, as the numbers of regular players had dwindled. This was due to a combination of emigration, older members passing away, safety concerns about driving, and declining interest in face-to-face play.

After rekindling relationships with Mattel (distributors of Scrabble in South Africa) and Jonathan Ball Publishers (distributors of Collins publications), and significant marketing blitzes on Facebook led by our energetic President Andrew Goldberg (an attorney), Scrabble SA was again starting to attract new players.

There was a buzz about the beautiful game again. In Johannesburg, we hosted 47 players at a local tournament and we were due to hold a word-themed pub quiz on 21 May 2020, followed by a fully prebooked tournament of 40 players the following week. We had to turn away players from both events due to space constraints. Sadly, everything had to be cancelled when SA's President Cyril Ramaphosa enforced a strict nationwide lockdown. The disappointment was palpable.

Llewellyn Jegels (a lecturer, author, Scrabble champ and chess enthusiast), was not going to take this feeling of helplessness lying down. "It's my stubborn nature," he said. "I had to find some counter-revolutionary act against the virus. I thought, 'Screw this! There must be something I can do for our Scrabble tribe, our community.' I thought that an international match through the Internet Scrabble Club (ISC) www.isc.ro might generate some interest and give Scrabblers something to do other than just playing each other randomly online."

Llewellyn first organised a successful national (South African) lockdown tournament and then contacted Nicky Huitson, who put him in touch with James Burley. Burley, who has been hosting daily ISC tournaments aptly named 'Teatime Teaser', 'Fast and Furious', and 'Late Evening' rustled up a UK team of ten.

The Lockdown Showdown International was a reality. It was a double round-robin played over two days, with 20 games of 15 minutes a side – 200 games in total.

James Burley ran the tournament using the tsh software, and several games were livestreamed

on Twitch.tv, commentated on by former World Champion Craig Beevers, with some games also having expert commentary from top South African player Jeyad Page.

South Africa's team was below full strength, with Page and Dr Trevor Hovelmeier missing in action due to work commitments. In the end, the depth and class of Team UK showed, as they won the matchup convincingly, 129–71. Our SA players, though, thoroughly enjoyed the tough games, and were inextricably hooked on the format. My gob was suitably smacked when UK's Bob Violett extended TE to FRIZeT(TE) to reach a triple for plenty of points.

South African champion Dr Harry Wiggins (a mathematician and former *Survivor* contestant) said, "The matchup versus the UK was a wonderful two-day tournament on ISC. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Very exciting and such a cool format. I was chuffed to beat Paul Allan twice!"


Goldberg was still shell-shocked two days later when he recalled how UK's Colin Northmore blocked him by playing the non-extendable word 'PERITI' (theological advisers).

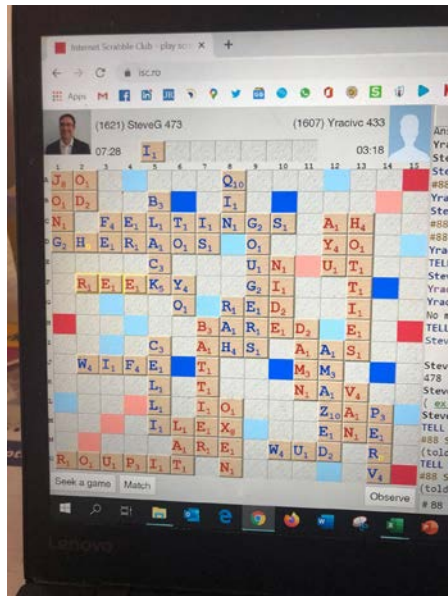
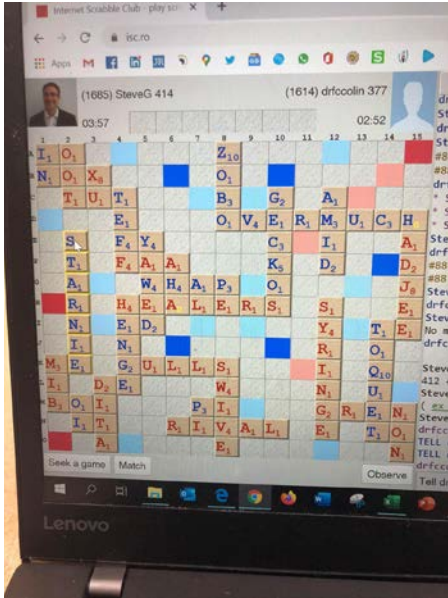
As the only woman on the South African team, interior designer Di Mason said she was honoured to represent her country and satisfied with a mid-table finish. "The British field was exceptionally strong," she said.

Since then, Llewellyn has organised international matches against Kenya (which South Africa won by a whisker), New Zealand (where the mighty 'All Blanks' just beat the 'BingBoks' by a razor-thin margin) and Singapore, (won by the East Asians after a genuinely amazing second-half comeback). Against Singapore there was even a B-team fielded, which allowed some firstlings international exposure.

Mason said, "Lockdown tournaments have offered an exciting diversion to the otherwise numbing COVID-19 media conversations which leave you wondering if there will be any form of life after this passes, and keeps the brain alive and stimulated. I have found it very interesting to find out a bit more about the people I have played with in these tournaments through Facebook. So, I am armed with a Red Bull, handsome amount of chocolate, and a few other snacks, as well as my trusty hound whose head competes for attention and nudges the mouse, sometimes causing the odd misplay as the letter sticks somewhere it's not supposed to."

Online Scrabble has increased camaraderie and board-play knowledge, and has kept our community together, while we're all alone.

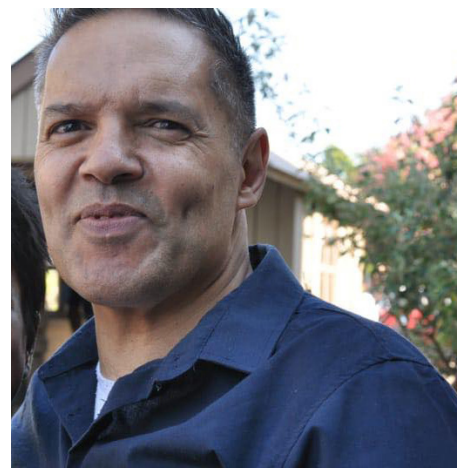
So, happily, lockdown has not been meant Scrabble meltdown. 



Above: Screenshots of Steven Gruzd's games against Colin Northmore (top) and Chris Vicary (bottom)

Centre right, vertically: Four of the ten members of Team UK – top to bottom: Paul Gallen, Natalie Zolty, Paul Allan, Stu Harkness

Far right, vertically: Four of the ten members of Team SA – top to bottom: Steven Gruzd, Andrew Goldberg, Harry Wiggins, Llewellyn Jegels



Pictures: Team SA – Gwen Rea; Team UK – Elie Dangoor, Peter Sargeant, Natalie Zolty, Stu Harkness

On the importance of blanks

David Sutton takes a look at how much influence the drawing of blank tiles exerts on top-level games

The blank tile exerts a powerful influence on the game of Scrabble, no doubt about that. But just how powerful? I have been looking at some figures I have derived from my extensive database of top-class games, and the answers may surprise you. It turns out that even the mighty Nigel Richards, who wins 88% of games when he gets two blanks, and 68% when he gets one blank, can manage only 44% when he gets no blanks. (I can see this starting a 'No Blanks For Nigel' campaign.)

Let's look first at the overall picture. Here are some statistics, based on a total of 7953 CSW games from OSWI onwards, as culled from *crosstables.com* and various tournament sources, notably the Kings Cup and WSC sites. Most of the games are between players ranked expert or above, and all are at the very least between club players well versed in tournament play.

Average game score for player with two blanks	460
Average game score for player with one blank	429
Average game score for player with no blanks	398
Average number of bonuses with two blanks	2.60
Average number of bonuses with one blank	2.09
Average number of bonuses with no blanks	1.51
Winning percentage with two blanks	72.76
Winning percentage with one blank	49.67
Winning percentage with no blanks	26.96
(Note: Total number of games drawn = 39)	
Total games where one player has both blanks	3954
Total games where each player has one blank	3969

Now let's look at the figures for some individual players, which I have tabulated on the opposite page. I mean no disrespect to the prowess of the American players such as Will Anderson and Dave Koenig, but it is worth remembering that many of their games are from domestic CSW tournaments where their opposition is likely to be somewhat weaker than that faced by, for example, Richards and Eldar, whose games are virtually all taken from strong international tournaments. But the ratios showing the effect of the blanks are still much the same.

The columns are as follows:

TotG = total games played (for which I have the records)

AvS2, AvS1, AvS0 = average game score where player has 2, 1 or 0 blanks

AvB2, AvB1, AvB0 = average number of bonuses where player has 2, 1 or 0 blanks

WpB2, WpB1, WpB0 = winning percentage where player has 2, 1 or 0 blanks

Name	TotG	AvS2	AvS1	AvS0	AvB2	AvB1	AvB0	WpB2	WpB1	WpB0
Austin Shin	136	460	441	426	2.63	2.31	1.93	80.0	52.7	29.6
Chris Lipe	188	467	444	397	2.58	2.28	1.45	73.3	55.5	22.6
Dave Koenig	149	491	447	398	3.22	2.33	1.54	89.1	56.0	21.6
David Eldar	223	462	458	417	2.69	2.50	1.97	75.9	64.7	40.6
David Wiegand	207	466	451	427	2.58	2.28	1.74	73.3	60.4	36.9
Jesse Day	593	488	460	426	2.84	2.44	1.83	82.5	62.7	37.0
Lewis Mackay	279	483	449	413	3.03	2.35	1.79	82.5	62.3	23.1
Naween Fernando	198	454	426	405	2.58	1.89	1.80	88.0	54.4	29.0
Nigel Richards	656	494	461	421	2.80	2.33	1.70	88.1	68.4	44.4
Will Anderson	307	504	456	427	3.05	2.36	1.77	95.0	69.7	49.3

It is apparent that most players are around three times more likely to win a game if they get both blanks than if they get neither blank, and it takes all the skill and knowledge of the very best in the world – Richards and Eldar – to bring these odds down to twice as likely. So, I think we can conclude that the distribution of the blanks exerts a profound influence on the outcome of the game, and incidentally on average game score and number of bonuses played. I know that some have considered this influence disproportionate and would like to see the blank tile abolished, or have it somehow arranged that each player receives one. My own feelings about this are ambivalent: on the one hand I would like to see Scrabble become more a game of skill and knowledge and less one of luck, a feeling that intensifies when I'm not the one getting the luck, but on the other hand I recognise that the blank tile, and the ability to exploit it effectively, are so well-established and integral to the game that change is not going to happen any time soon. After all, considering how the rank and file of players have resisted penalty challenge over the years, it seems totally unlikely that they would ever give up their blanks!

‘We heard that there was some health incident in China, but that wouldn’t affect us, would it?’



First Eden Valley Tournament

Famous last words, as they say! But undaunted, the organisers went ahead with their inaugural event anyway – and hope that although this was one of the last face-to-face meets to take place before the general shutdown of live play, it certainly won’t be their last tournament! **Martin Fagan** tells us more

After playing for several years with the Shipley Scrabble Club, which continues under the able guidance of Sandra Walton, we (that is, Fiona Shoemith and Martin Fagan) moved at the beginning of 2019 from Bingley to Bolton, in Westmorland, a small village close to the former county town of Appleby. This is a pastoral area spread between the North Pennine hills of Cross Fell to the north, the Westmorland Dales to the south, and the Lake District to the west, guarded by the larger town of Penrith. Finding ourselves with a dearth of opportunities to play competitive Scrabble, we decided to run a tournament of our own.

The first item on the checklist was to decide on a suitable venue. After a search around the local village halls and community centres, we decided to hold the competition in the neighbouring village of Cliburn. The hall there was built in 2002, which meant that the facilities were all on one level with full disabled access, and had the bonus of a small meeting room which we could use as a lounge for the all-important post mortems after the players had completed their games. Fiona was going to be TD, and although she has had experience for several years running the Shipley Charity Competitions, this was to be her first rated tournament as organiser and director.

The competition, scheduled to be held on Saturday 14 March, was published on the ABSP calendar and advertised, so all we had to do was wait and see who would enter.



Then 2020 dawned. It brought with it three unwelcome visitors, Ciara, Dennis and Jorge. The Eden Valley flooded, and for a time we were living on an island. In turn, this caused a major water main to fail on the fastnesses of Shap Fell, and we were without water for three days. Still the entries continued to come in – there surely couldn't be anything else that could happen to disrupt the event. We heard that there was some health incident in China, but that wouldn't affect us, would it?

Well that plan didn't quite work out, and so some furious last-minute board-, tile- and bag-cleaning took place (electric toothbrushes are highly recommended for cleaning between the ridges on a tournament board), and unfortunately some entrants with underlying health issues had to cancel.

In the end, 18 players from across England and Scotland attended, most of whom were using the opportunity to play a double-header, travelling on to Middlesbrough on the Sunday morning. Barry French was one, and he found out a little too late that this far north there are no such things as rural bus services, so we managed to get him a lift from Penrith Station to the venue.

The tournament of seven games was organised into two divisions. Division A had eight players in round robin format, and Division B consisted of ten players.

Both were closely fought, with the top places not certain until the last game, but in the end, Colin Northmore took the honours in Division A, with six wins to one loss and a spread of 132, while Barry French swept the pack in Division B with seven wins for a spread of 412.

Our thanks must go to Ross Mackenzie for his patient support to Fiona in creating the tsh files, and to Yvonne Holland for her help in setting up the venue, and of course to all the entrants for supporting this event. We are certainly glad to have run this, and hope to organise more in the future.

We would like to conclude this short write-up with an invitation to any players in the broader East Cumbria/ North Lakes/ West Durham areas to contact us with a view to forming a Scrabble Club based in the Eden Valley, either via email (martinfagan@rocketmail.com) or by phone (07771 665923). □

Main picture, facing page: *The venue for the tournament was a hall in the neighbouring village of Cliburn*

Left: *Electric toothbrushes were found to be very efficient for cleaning the Scrabble boards in preparation for the event!*

ISC strikes back

What would life be without Scrabble? To fill the void left by the absence of face-to-face friendlies, club games and tournaments, Wayne Kelly, Natalie Zolty and Chris Harrison have found an online alternative. Chris reports on these very popular ABSP events ...

In late winter, much of the world was in the early grip of the COVID-19 Pandemic. At that stage, I am not sure many expected that the whole country would grind to a halt in the way that it has, but soon enough some tournaments started falling by the wayside, and government guidance towards the end of March meant we had to push the pause button on all face-to-face Scrabble for an indefinite period. Some of the ABSP committee had a shared desire to offer something to fill the void left by a bare calendar of events, and also to bring members together during lockdown in a real-time environment that was as close to the real thing as could be achieved safely.

Although the ABSP already runs an online league, both software limitations and an obvious problem with aligning multiple schedules mean it is not played under timed conditions, or with a challenge mode that replicates that which you would find across a real board. It's great for what it is — slow-paced games at flexible hours to suit. Over 100 members take part regularly, fortnight after fortnight, but the platform used lacks a little versatility.

We wanted to run a proper online tournament, and so, with that in mind, there was only option. The Internet Scrabble Club, or ISC for short, had once been a firm favourite in the early 2000s, and played host to plenty of online events even back then. Sure, not too many of them had been in real-time, but it couldn't be that much harder, right?

Maybe the greater challenge would be getting people to migrate back. ISC had fallen out of vogue in recent years, with complaints about both a retro interface and ever-changing lives contributing to a situation that saw only a few die-hard members actively using once-busy accounts. Could we lure them back?

For those who don't know much about ISC, it is one of the oldest online Scrabble platforms still in operation. Traditionally, the only play mode was using software called Wordbiz, which was downloaded to PCs or laptops. That still exists, and is typically the preference for those who play that way, but you can now also use ISC web-based if you prefer, via any device including mobiles and tablets, at www.isc.ro. ISC boasts members from all over the world, and we're far from being the only ones to be using it more in recent times. For new users, it is not always the most intuitive, but its flexibility and range of variables such as game length, challenge mode and dictionary, is unrivalled, and from the perspective of managing an event, it is head and shoulders above any other current offering.

Our first event took place on 28 March with 30 players taking part in a World Cup-style tournament, with group stages in the morning and knockouts in the afternoon (including a plate to keep those eliminated early, occupied). This proved a great success, and although it was not our initial intention, we have run at least one event every weekend since!

Wayne Kelly won the first two events, but since then we have had a whole stream of different winners, all getting custom-designed medals created by Paul Coyle. We hope to bring you a fuller table in a later issue.

The environment provided by ISC allows us to be bolder and more innovative with formats, some of which are better suited to run on tsh, and others using Google Docs, but in all cases we have removed the need for players to submit scores, so they can just enjoy their Scrabble and let us take care of everything else.

Our biggest event to date was over the Easter break, when we ran six separate events over three days, including a grand finale with 36 players. This event went right down to the wire, with Calum Edwards holding onto first place in a tight final game with his nearest rival.

As well as weekend events, there have been specials to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day and a Eurovision that was not. For our VE event, we ran a side contest, with victory points on offer for every move that scored 75 points or more. We have also introduced a weekly Tuesday Night Scrabble Club, which has an ever-growing number of regulars, and a cumulative performance prize for the best series.

We are fast approaching 100 players now, battling it out over 2000 games across more than 20 sessions, figures that seemed unthinkable only a few weeks ago.

Here are the winners of each event so far:

No	Event	Winner
1	Groups & Knockout	Wayne Kelly
2	Open	Wayne Kelly
3A	Easter Extravaganza Qualifier A	Elie Dangoor
3B	Easter Extravaganza Qualifier B	Colin Northmore
3C	Easter Extravaganza Qualifier C	Gary Oliver
3D	Easter Extravaganza Qualifier D	Calum Edwards
3E	Easter Extravaganza Qualifier E	Bob Violett
3F	Easter Extravaganza – Showcase Showdown	Calum Edwards
4	Civil War	Gary Oliver
5A	Double Trouble A	Chris Harrison
5B	Double Trouble B	Paul Allan
6A	Tuesday Night Scrabble Club A	Phil Robertshaw
6B	Tuesday Night Scrabble Club B	Adeniyi Adebayo
6C	Tuesday Night Scrabble Club C	Phil Robertshaw
7	Rank & File	Rik Kennedy
8	Scrabble for Victory	Rik Kennedy & Mike Chappell
9A	Triple Trouble A	Rik Kennedy
9B	Triple Trouble B	Wayne Kelly
9C	Triple Trouble C	Phil Robertshaw

Paul Allan currently heads our ongoing leaderboard with a win percentage of 84. Phil Robertshaw and Wayne Kelly are above 75% each, with Rik Kennedy in hot pursuit of the top three. Colin Nicol is currently our most prolific player. He has taken part in every event so far, clocking up over 150 games in the process.

Although we initially started via our ABSP Discussion group on Facebook, we have recently sent out communication to all those members for whom we have an email address, explaining the ABSP's ongoing position during lockdown, and promoting the events.

We have set up a small mailing list and a permanent ABSP channel on ISC (#29), which makes it easier to communicate with players during events, so those who are without Facebook are not missing out.

It may not be exactly the real thing, but during current times we hope to see even more members join us, with a range of different times and dates from which to choose.

Even if you are not in our Facebook group, you can see basic information on the ABSP website www.absp.org, or email Chris Harrison at chris6378@hotmail.com to find out more.



When lockdown finally eases, we plan to hold a Champion of Champions-style end-of-season spectacular (with two tiers), although there are already plenty of members hoping it will not bring to an end to our ISC events for good. We are really proud of what we have been able to achieve so far, and how much it has united the community during times of such uncertainty. The feedback across the board has been way beyond what we ever imagined, and it is fantastic to see so many embracing the diversity of our formats and overcoming any initial technological teething troubles on ISC.

Above are a couple of winning final boards from recent events involving Stu Harkness (*Hightower9*), Paul Allan (*taghairm*), Chris Harrison (*WordsWhizz*) and Phil Robertshaw (*magichour*). If you have any interesting ISC boards to share, please send to the editor of *OnBoard*: editor@absp.org.uk, and they may be featured in a future issue. □

Playing Scrabble — the Greek way!



I've been playing the game for the last 30 years with friends at home, but I decided to join my local club just under nine years ago. Since then, I have regularly participated in most of the competitive Scrabble tournaments in Greece. From my point of view, the game itself is very attractive and fun, as it combines versatility, wit, perception, thinking speed, dexterity, strategy, rich vocabulary, and luck. I never play online, but I know very well that there are many players who prefer to play mainly online rather than playing live games. I strongly believe that only 'real-life' games offer the guarantee of spreading competitive tournament Scrabble throughout the country.

Think you have a lot of words in your cardbox? Spare a thought for the nation that has many more in its lexicon — and comprehensive dictionaries are scarce. **Thrasos Myrsinis (Θράσος Μυρσινίης), President of the Greek Scrabble Union, explains**

Of course, this may be subject to appeal due to the pandemic ...

Greek competitive tournament Scrabble was born in the picturesque city of Kastoria 19 years ago, in 2000. The local Scrabble Club of Kastoria created the first rules, the first two-letter and three-letter word lists, the first specialised Scrabble word list up to a maximum of eight-letter words, the first tournaments, etc.

Nowadays, there are six local Scrabble clubs (in the cities of Athens, Thessaloniki, Rhodes, Kastoria, Veria and Ptolemaida). Each one has about 30, 40, or as many as 60 active members. Every club organises a local



annual championship, and once a year an open weekend tournament of six to seven rounds), where 70, 80, or even 120 players from all over the country take part. Each tournament also features a fun party, including food, drink and live music!

In addition to these six clubs, there are many players who live in different parts of the country and do not belong to one of these local clubs, but do take part in the tournaments.

The local clubs worked together for many years in order to eventually establish something like an 'association' (actually a partnership), which is officially called the Greek Scrabble Union (<http://greekscrabble.gr/>). Every tournament player is a member of this Union. The main principles and purposes are to spread the game throughout the country, to ensure common rules, to update the ratings list, to organise the annual Greek Scrabble Championship (ten rounds) and the Scrabble Grand Prix (14 rounds), to recognise records, etc. Today, there are about 300 competitive (tournament) Scrabble players in total throughout Greece.

As in the United Kingdom and other countries, Greek Scrabble players are approximately 50 percent male and 50 percent female. The average players' age is around 45–50. Unfortunately, it seems that competitive (tournament) Scrabble is not very attractive to young people ...

For the past seven years, the local Ptolemaida Scrabble Club has been organising a successful annual mini Scrabble tournament (three rounds) for high school students (aged 12–15).

Recently, the Greek Scrabble Union and the Centre for the Greek

Language (a non-profit research state institute, supervised by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs) decided to co-operate on a project in order to introduce Scrabble as a teaching tool for the Greek language in all formal and informal Greek-speaking schools all over the world.

The Greek language is a priceless treasure! It is a very difficult language, with a very large and rich vocabulary. We also have very difficult grammar. In our tournament games we never play Ancient Greek words that are no longer in use in everyday speech. Unlike in English – where, for example, if you conjugate the verb 'play', there are, I think, only four word types produced from the base word (play, plays, played, playing) – in Greek, the same verb produces more than 80 word variants!

Dictionaries are a big problem for us. Bookstores sell many different ones for the Greek language, but none is complete enough, due to the volume of data and high selling price. Good dictionaries have only about 60,000–75,000 original words. Usually, Greek speakers use fewer than 10,000 words to communicate with each other. If one is more educated, he can use 15,000–20,000 words in his speech. However, in Modern Greek it is estimated that there are more than 500,000 original words, of which more than four million word variants are produced! So one understands why it's so difficult for us to build a compile a Scrabble dictionary of two- to 15-letter words ...

We have two- and three-letter words lists available for free. We also have unofficial (informal) two- to eight-letter words lists, available in a book, for sale. It contains approximately 152,000 words. There are also Internet sites (something like an application) where everyone can check if a word with no more than eight letters is valid or invalid. There is a group of players who are working to extend the data base in this digital tool. A complete list of two- to 15-letter words is under construction. They hope it will contain more than 1,500,000 words, including as many dictionaries as possible. They also hope this will be ready soon.

We plan to hold the first Scrabble World Championship in Greek at a future date, and hope our State will support the project. There are about eight million people living abroad who speak Greek, either as Greek emigrants or as foreigners who have studied Greek as a second language.

We should also mention that in September 2020, the Spanish-language Scrabble European Championship will be held in Athens.

A nice idea would be to hold a joint Greek-English tournament in Greece. It would be a great honour and a great pleasure for us to host such a tournament, which would give Greek and English Scrabble friends the opportunity to get to know each other and have fun together! This, of course, when the coronavirus pandemic is over ... ☐





With Scrabble players all stuck at home unable to play in face-to-face events, I decided I would give some of them something to do, and organised an online Duplicate Scrabble tournament. The Millfield (Peterborough) Scrabble club I attend plays real-life Duplicate Scrabble once a month, so it was nothing new to me, but to spice things up a bit I introduced few changes for this online version.

Firstly, we played the game on a SuperScrabble board with 200 tiles, and the deadline for submitting each move was two days, rather than the usual two minutes, but the biggest change was that players had 14 tiles to choose from to make their moves! As most players didn't have a SuperScrabble board on which to play at home, I posted screenshots of the game (which I was running on Quackle's SuperScrabble setting) as we went along.

DUPLICATE (SUPER)SCRABBLE IN LOCKDOWN!

The resourceful **Chris Hawkins** found an imaginative way to substitute for face-to-face games during these unprecedented times

For those not familiar with the rules of 'normal' Duplicate Scrabble, players all have the same tiles to play with, on their own board, and at the end of each timed round have to submit a move to the games-master. If they fail to find the highest-scoring play, they still score the points for whatever move they did play, but before the next round starts, they change their board to show the highest-scoring move, hence the game being called Duplicate Scrabble, as all the players' boards (and racks) are duplicates of each other.

So, on with the report of my online, 14-tile Duplicate SuperScrabble game. The opening rack I drew was EEGILN000QRRSU, and eight players submitted moves ranging in score from 52 to 162! Because players were able to play words longer than seven letters, it was possible to play a 'six-timer' on the very first move, and two players, Paul Allan and Elie Dangoor, both found the highest-scoring word, RELIQUES. It scored 48 points more than the second-highest-scoring word (ENQUIRERS), and gave them both a big early advantage. Three other players, namely Imaad Ali, Darryl Francis and Jack Mitchell,

On 21 March this year, I was meant to be taking part in, and running, the Peterborough Allnighter tournament, but unfortunately it was cancelled (just two days before it was due to start!) due to concerns about spreading the coronavirus. Two days later, the country officially went into lockdown, which at time of writing we are still adhering to, albeit with some restrictions lifted.

found the highest-scoring word in Round 2 (either of MORTICING or CRIMINATOR scored 56; as two of them had declared MORTICING, that was word we went forward with). It scored only two points more than the next best play, so they didn't claw much back on the leaders, though!

As games-master, I wasn't technically playing; the actual players were all being trusted not to use anagramming tools, etc., (although they were allowed to verify that a word that they thought of themselves was valid, before submitting it to me). I, on the other hand was using Quackle, etc, to find best plays, and as it turned out this was the only move of the whole game where players failed to find the actual highest-scoring play. Mind you, they didn't miss it by much: where Jack had played CRIMINATOR for 56, CRIMINATORS (on a different part of the board; he didn't forget to put the S on!) for 57 was possible.

The game progressed; early racks were quite vowel-heavy. Paul led from Elie early on, but in Round 8 Elie took the lead when he (and three others) found the top-scoring word (the six-vowel, ten-letter word OPINIONATE) and Paul missed it, scoring 31 fewer points. Paul retook the lead, and Darryl Francis moved into second, when they both outscored Elie by 68 points with SEALWAX for 170, the highest-scoring word of the game so far. That was surpassed two moves later when Muhammad Abdullah found the brilliant OZONIFEROUS (the only 11-letter word of the game) for 172.

Two further moves later, a whole bunch of people found the top-scoring word: ADJACENT, for 246! It was a 12-timer (quadruple-triple word, something that's only possible on a SuperScrabble board), and crucially, Paul missed it (scoring 'only' 222!), so Darryl extended the lead over Paul that he first gained the move before.

Paul closed to within one point on move 15, and on move 16 Paul went back into the lead (by two!) when he was the only player to find the unusual looking BEINKED. Paul and Darryl's nip-and-tuck sparring continued; indeed, on move 17 they

Final board. Winner: DARRYL FRANCIS! 2758 out of 2945 (93.7%)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
1		C				M	A	H	E	W	U			A	D	J	A	C	E	N	T
2		O		O	Z	O	N	I	F	E	R	O	U	S							
3		A	P	P	A	Y	D				B	E	I	N	K	E	D				
4		D		I												F	O	L	K		
5		J		N												V					B
6		U		I												N	E	T	I	Z	E
7		T		O			H	A	R	V	E	S	T	M	A	N					D
8	M	O	O	N	E	Y	E	S						O						T	W
9	U	R		A	M									R							E
10	D		S	T										T	M						T
11	D		E	E										R	E	L	I	Q	U	E	S
12	L		A											C	T						C
13	I		L					S						H	I	N	T				O
14	N		W					Q						A	N	T					D
15	G		A				O	U	T	W	R	O	U	G	H	T					E
16	S		X			G	A							L							X
17						P	A	N	S	Y				M							A
18						F	I	R	E	H	O	S	E								G
19			C	O	A	R	B		I					I	N	F	E	A	S	I	B
20								L						R							N
21	R	O	C	K	E	T	R	Y													G

were dead level on 1,881 points each! On move 19, Darryl retook the lead with the unsavoury best word BEDWETTER, which Paul missed. This was the turning point, as Darryl wasn't to relinquish his lead for the rest of the game (eight more moves).

Having been vowel-heavy early on in the game, players had to contend with many consonant-heavy racks towards the end – indeed, the final rack consisted of ten consonants and no vowels! It was decided to speed up the endgame: players would play out all ten tiles with multiple plays in one 'move', the best 'endgame' outplay being Dave Koenig and Brian Galebach's 108 points in eight plays.

So after 27 rounds and nearly eight weeks, the game came to an end. Darryl finished first on 2,758 points out of a possible 2,945. Elie finished in second place on 2,698, and Paul was third on 2,675.

Altogether, 17 players were still playing at the end, and eight players played the whole game (i.e. submitted a move in all 27 rounds), but many others (over 25, in fact) had either played for the vast majority of the game, or at least some part of it.

For these players, another metric I used to measure their performance was the percentage of the maximum possible score they could have got, just for the moves they had participated in (I also worked this for the players of the whole game). This percentage was a useful way of gauging players' relative strengths, even if they were hundreds of points apart in the league table.

At time of writing, there are plans to start a second game. It will probably still be going on when you read this, so if you want to join in, or follow players' progress, just get in touch with me! (chawk756@aol.com) ☐

Scrabble GO –the sequel

In this follow-up to his article in the April issue of the magazine, Chris Hawkins continues his discussion of the new online Scrabble app, and counters some of the controversy that surrounds it

A couple of months ago, I wrote an article for *OnBoard* about the (then) relatively new Scrabble app called Scrabble GO, published by Scopely. It focused mainly on the user interface (homepage), touching only briefly on the gameplay aspects and other features included in the game.

The article implied there would be a follow-up article going into more details regarding these elements. Well, here is that article. However, two months is a (very) long time in the life of online Scrabble apps; since that first article, Scrabble GO has appeared everywhere, with stories appearing on mainstream websites like the BBC, how-to videos (detailing just about every aspect of the app you could possibly wish to know about) popping up on YouTube, and a particularly vocal backlash growing seemingly all over the Internet, with a number of online Scrabble players expressing their extreme dislike of it. So, I decided that, rather than write a follow-up article describing in detail the things I said I would look at before, I would address the concerns of the critics, hopefully allaying many of their fears and concerns. If you haven't downloaded the app yet, it's still free to do so, and if/when you do, there is plenty of help to get you started both within the app, itself and, as I stated, in the form of instructional videos.

On the other side of the opinion spectrum from those who have rejected the app, are the players who have been (on the whole) happily using it since they first got it, learning to adapt to its 'bells and whistles' nature, visiting the parts of it they most enjoy, tolerating patiently the adverts that may inhabit certain aspects of gameplay (in common with many apps that depend on adverts or the payment of an 'ad-free' fee, for revenue), telling their friends how good it actually is, and not being swayed by all those pessimists. Some of the latter will have been influenced by having got

into flame wars in chatrooms with other users, having themselves used the app for only about five minutes, instead of giving it a chance, and actually learning how to use it.

One of the main bugbears of so many of the detractors is the lack of a gameplay mode that replicates the experience of the app that Scrabble GO is replacing, namely EA Scrabble. However, once you find 'Classic' Mode on Scrabble GO, you'll wonder what they are on about; this function of the app gives users about as similar a Scrabble experience to EA Scrabble as one could hope for. The basic screen layout (player names and scores at the top, board in the middle, rack at the bottom) is the same, 'drag and drop' game dynamics are the same, no 'cheats' are available (if you want them, choose the 'Modern' version of the game from the start menu) – not even the 'Teacher' that EA Scrabble included.

Scopely, the app's developers, have been excellent at keeping an ongoing communication channel going with a 'council' that includes a variety of tournament-level and other Scrabble players with a wide range of abilities, who have advised what additional features they'd like Classic mode (and other aspects of the app) to include in future updates, and (at time of writing) there have already been a series of mini-updates addressing some of these requests. True, it may be a while longer before we see EA Scrabble's multiplayer (three-to-four player) games and a ratings system based more than on knowing what your opponent's average score is, but I feel our voices are being heard and what we ask for, we will (mostly) get.

From a personal point of view, I have scaled back my interaction with the Scrabble GO app. I still go on it daily, to make a move against my 20 or so opponents if they have made one against

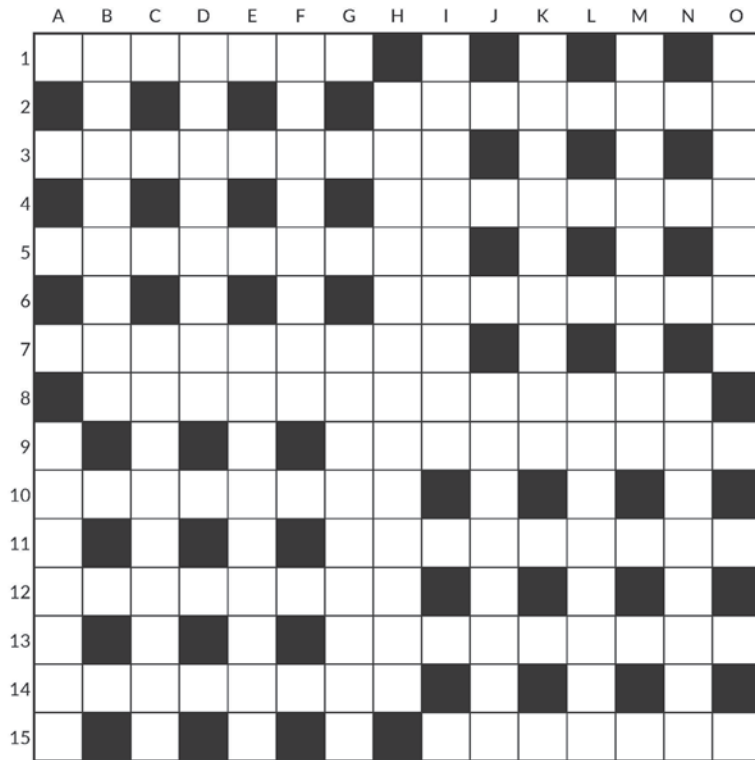


me in the previous 24 hours. Back in March, I was playing on it for an average of four hours a day, every day(!) as I sought to collect new tile sets, get promoted to Emerald level, open as many chests as I could as I played in the side games such as Duels and Word Drop. These are excellent additional features of the app, and provide wonderful opportunities to broaden one's word-based fun, but for me the bottom line is, once you've mastered Scrabble GO's basics, it should be your go-to place to play turn-based Scrabble online.

One final thing, in the photo above, you can see evidence of only the third-ever 12-letter bonus I've played in competitive Scrabble (the other two were (ELDER) BERRIES and UNDER(COAT)ING), that I achieved in a friendly game against Mike Willis on Scrabble GO. Mike had just played CHANT, and after I'd tried and failed to spot a nine-timer through the C at the top of the board (it turned out there wasn't one), I thought of trying MERCHANTINGS through Mike's CHANT, and lo and behold, it was good! I won the game 487–485, bringing the head-to-head game score between Mike and me to 34–33 to Mike (after a shaky start, Mike likes the app too!). It just goes to show, any app that inspires you to find and play 12-letter bonuses can't be all bad! □

Anagrid & Cryptogram 2

Anagrid clues

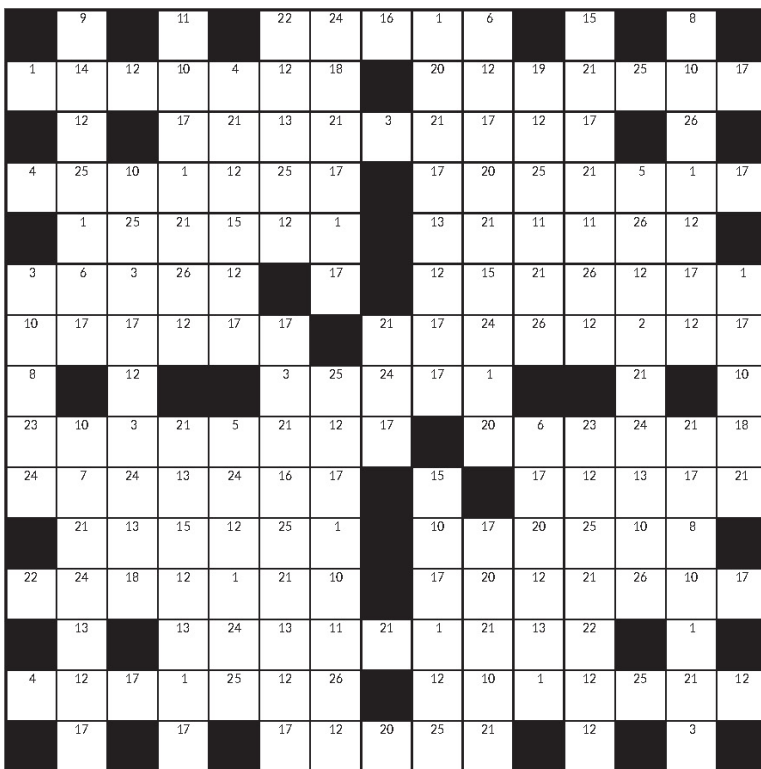


HORIZONTAL CLUES

1. NOXGLEY
2. BAELETIC
3. CROONNEAL
4. SLINTILE
5. SPIUMJUST
6. SHOTNEAL
7. BEATINESS
8. YTTIRELATION
9. NITERRIES
10. OTTERAIL
11. LUSTIRRAS
12. SUCHHORN
13. GENCORDAL
14. TANNOYFT
15. GINYEPS

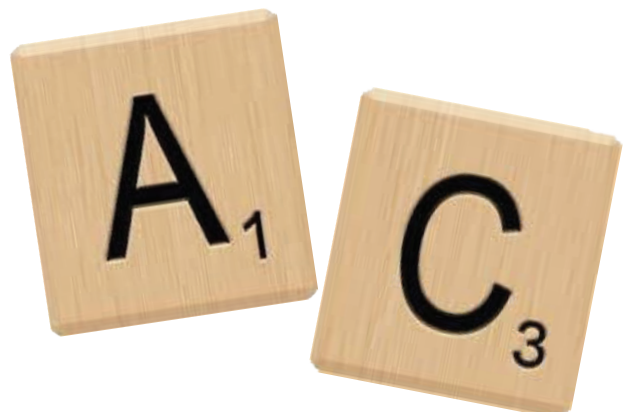
VERTICAL CLUES

- a. GRALFIN
- b. GUNSALTY
- c. BRONXSHOT
- d. CIREPOCU
- e. HISSARRAC
- f. CETAVEAU
- g. CRUNTTISS
- h. TYNELOCUTIONS
- i. NEETISING
- j. INSTATAT
- k. AEDELIBLY
- l. ROIRYSIR
- m. MICTATION
- n. EYERENTS
- o. FATTEES



A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13													
									A	B															
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26													

Find the solutions on the inside back cover of this issue!



Word Perfect

with Chris Harrison

Quiz #2: Seven Wonders

As I put this latest quiz together, most ABSP members are in a version of lockdown, and I am seeing plenty of reports on social media about Scrabblers ramping up their cardboxing or putting in more hours of learning via other methods. At this rate, when face-to-face Scrabble is able to safely resume, the standard should soar through the roof!

When people start to undertake some serious study, probability is often a good way to begin, especially for bonus plays, so all answers this month are taken from the top 1000 most probable Sevens in CSW2019.



Can you get all 20 and be Word Perfect? Remember all solutions must have exactly seven letters.

Answers can be found on the inside back cover.

- 1 Naturally occurring poisonous element, or the partner of *Old Lace*.
- 2 Made by Ford, and the UK's best-selling car of the 1970s.
- 3 Must-have accessory for Ena Sharples and Kate Middleton.
- 4 Bursting with Vitamin C, and definitely *Not the Only Fruit*.
- 5 Lacking distinguishing or bold characteristics, maybe like Switzerland?
- 6 Peter Shilton, David Seaman, Jordan Pickford.
- 7 Flavourful aromatic herb, its name literally means 'brightness of the mountain'.
- 8 Most commonly asked of magic mirrors: "Who is the _____ of them all?"
- 9 British girl group whose line-up was not *Always & Forever*.
- 10 Such a clever clogs ... only one of these has the answer.
- 11 Bevan, the politician or Barnard, the actor.
- 12 Leather covered ball, slightly larger than a tennis ball, used in the Gaelic sport Hurling.
- 13 Sweet or savoury spiral-shaped European dish, typically made with meat or pastry.
- 14 Harry Potter's Aunt or Porky Pig's girlfriend.
- 15 One of five factions in the *Divergent* book series, it represents knowledge, intelligence, curiosity and astuteness.
- 16 Could be 1000 or 2000 but both are a classic.
- 17 *Mommie _____*, memoir written by Christina Crawford, the adopted daughter of actress Joan.
- 18 You might want to do this on Cavity Sam, but definitely not for a buzz.
- 19 Sulphide mineral – its iridescence spawned the nickname 'peacock ore'.
- 20 Short-lived 1990s BBC drama – the theme tune *More to Life* was a hit for Cliff Richard.

OBITUARY

Temu Oluku



The ABSP received news of Temu's death in early May, with him having passed away on 30 April after a short illness. Although most players did not know a great deal about Temu, the outpouring of love from the Scrabble community following the shock news was genuine and very touching.

Temu was originally from Nigeria, and came over to the UK to study in 2009. He settled in Birmingham, where his main roles were centred around the water networks and evaluation of environmental impacts.

Temu had been active in Scrabble in his homeland, but it wasn't till 2016 that he came along to his first tournament. I am proud to say Temu chose Warrington as his first event, and he admitted he was a little rusty on that first venture.

He became quite a regular at lots of events in those first few years, and while he was softly spoken, he often let his fingers do the talking, providing willing listeners with the chance to hear his piano playing. *Chariots of Fire* and *Heart and Soul* were amongst his more regular repertoire, certainly at Warrington events, where the piano could have done with a bit of tuning!



In the early days, he entered a few of the ABSP events that I ran, and occasionally we had a communication barrier as I explained the forms, and he went from his puzzled thoughtful face to his beaming smile when we got through to each other. And while he was fairly enigmatic in his life, he was certainly no Mona Lisa with his smile, and this is the thing that almost every one of the comments on Facebook was about.

Temu became more dedicated to the game, and in 2017 rose sharply through the ratings to take the Most Improved Player title for the year, with the award presented at the UK Open in 2018. He became more self-confident in the game, and always positive he was going to do well. One of his midgame quirks was putting tiles down and then changing his mind, when second thoughts were not always the best.

Temu was a regular attender at Sutton Coldfield Scrabble Club, where he would arrive straight after church on a Sunday night, always smartly dressed and with his trademark beaming smile. He was always cheerful and happy to play anyone at club, although he particularly relished playing the higher-rated players in his constant striving to up his game. He was gracious both when winning and in defeat. He eschewed the computer word-study programmes, and was often seen with long, handwritten lists of weird and wonderful words which he studied frequently.

His dedication to the game was most evident when, in what was probably the worst weather the country had had for a while, Temu traipsed three miles in the snow with no map from Stanstead Mountfitchett station to the Manuden venue, where almost everyone else coming by car had had to turn back. He held his rating that day, and that was his last event to seal his Most Improved Player title.

As we knew, Temu was a keen piano player, but his talents were usually used more in a church setting, as Temu was a very devout Christian and did not play many Sunday events. His brother also lived over in Birmingham, and thoughts go to his friends and family. There is a fundraiser page, if anybody wishes to donate, at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/in-memory-of-temu-oluku>

It may seem a while off before we can meet and all play Scrabble again, but whether at club or tournaments, one thing that will be missed by everyone is that broad smile.

— Wayne Kelly

Thanks to Sutton Coldfield Club for their input



DUSTING OFF THE ARCHIVES

with Rob Richland

25 years ago – APSP Newsletter, Issue 42, February 1995. Editor: Hartley Moorhouse

GOLDMAN

[referring to the court case between Mike Goldman and the ABSP]

A full statement about the case is bound into the centre of this issue.

Readers may like to know a little of the atmosphere that prevailed in the court. This observer was able to attend only for the first few days, and therefore missed the reported anguish that was directed at Goldman when the judgement was delivered. Before that, however, a feeling of unreality was dominant. Here were 30-odd people packed into a tiny courtroom with barristers in gowns and wigs arguing about the precise amount of time it had taken a man to go to the lavatory. Alice in Wonderland had nothing on it.

[Most of that full statement, from APSP President Allan Simmons, was as follows ...]

“Dear Members,

“I daresay most of you may have heard the result of the recent trial in respect of Mike Goldman’s £5,000 damages claim against myself, Graeme Thomas and Clive Spate relating to an incident at the Folkestone Tournament in 1990 when his clock was started in his absence. There have been a variety of news items in the press and on television, and members will clearly be wondering how this affects the APSP, and indeed the Scrabble movement in general.

“Let me first and foremost reassure everyone that: The APSP Committee continues, the APSP continues, and Scrabble tournaments continue. There is indeed only one loser!

“Although the APSP defendants lost technically and Goldman was awarded £90 damages, the opinion is that this was a second-best result given that Goldman’s £90 damages had cost him in the region of £8,000–£10,000. You may have seen for yourself how the media picked up on this! Whilst it is true that the APSP will have to contribute towards Goldman’s costs, it’s important to note that, because of the trivial damages, this will be a negligible amount (£100’s rather than £1000’s).

“Clearly, the APSP has its own costs to find, which are still to be confirmed, but could be in the region of £10,000–£15,000. The APSP Committee will take responsibility for organising payment of these costs.

“There have already been overwhelming offers of support from our Scrabble friends overseas (America, Australia and elsewhere) as well as an instant response from the UK Scrabble fraternity.

“On behalf of Graeme and Clive and the APSP Committee, thank you all so much for your heartwarming and reassuring support. Now let’s get on with the game.”

APSP GRANDMASTER AND EXPERT TITLES

For over a year, the APSP committee has been deliberating over the idea of awarding lifetime achievement titles similar to ‘Master’ and ‘Expert’ in chess, as suggested by Terry Hollington in the February 1994 newsletter.

GRANDMASTER CRITERIA

Any of the following:

- Three official (30+ games) Jan 1st ratings of 190+ in a five-year period
- Five consecutive official (30+ games) Jan 1st ratings of 180+
- An average of 185+ over five consecutive official (30+ games) Jan 1st ratings.

EXPERT CRITERIA

As above, but with levels of 180+, 170+ and 175+ substituted.

Pete Finley was given the task of sorting through the eight Jan 1st rating lists published to date and compiling a list of the qualifiers for both titles. The 1988 list proved to be irrelevant as only one tournament had been rated at that point, so no one had played 30 games. The remaining lists yielded up nine Grandmasters and 16 Experts ...

GRANDMASTERS

Phil Appleby, Pete Finley, John Grayson, Philip Nelkon, Mark Nyman, Allan Saldanha, Allan Simmons, Clive Spate, Gareth Williams.

EXPERTS

Russell Byers, Di Dennis, Richard Evans, Andrew Fisher, Darryl Francis, Simon Gillam, Helen Grayson, Ash Haji, Terry Kirk, Ruth Morgan-Thomas, Diane Pratesi, Robert Richland, Evan Simpson, Brian Sugar, Alec Webb, Mike Willis.

All title winners will be presented with a badge, similar in design to the Club and County Master badges which J.W.Spear has been awarding.

TOURNAMENT REPORTS

EXETER (ISCA and Easter Matchplay) – 14–17th April 1995

ISCA (6 games)

Terry Kirk took the prize in Division A (with five wins) on spread ahead of Andrew Fisher and Steve Balment.

EASTER MATCHPLAY (19 games)

Terry made it a weekend double by also winning Division A in the main event (with 13 wins), again on spread, ahead of Allan Simmons and Phil Appleby.

SCOTTISH CHAMPIONSHIP – 14 May 1995

The Championship, hosted by Dunfermline S.C., attracted 84 contestants and qualified for APSP rating for the first time.

Everyone was saddened by the news of the death of the champion for the last two years, John Catto. His memory will live on in Scottish Scrabble circles. It was John's wish that a special trophy be commissioned and presented on a two-yearly basis to Scotland's representative in the World Championships.

The trophy, named the John Catto Trophy of Excellence, was presented to Neil Scott, by John's fiancée, Mary Spence. (Neil also won the Scottish Championship).

APSP MASTERS (17 games) – 27–28 May 1995

18 of the top 19 players gathered in Leamington Spa for what was probably the strongest-ever field for a rated tournament in this country. The one missing name was that of Allan Saldanha, who had exams to sit.

Mark Nyman emerged the winner (with 12 wins) ahead of Clive Spate on spread. □

The top five rated players (at 1 January 1997) were:

205 Allan Saldanha
199 David Acton
199 Gareth Williams
194 Russell Byers
194 Mark Nyman

Staying in touch ...

Chris Harrison reports on the measures the ABSP is taking to remain in contact with members

When the ABSP committee last met, one of the things we discussed was how to best keep in touch with members, especially those not online, whilst postal *OnBoard* is suspended. We were also aware that our community includes some players for whom Scrabble is really important, and who might be feeling increasingly socially isolated at this time.

Identifying these members is not necessarily the easiest task. We may hold some basic information, but that doesn't always mean we know much about specific circumstances, family setup, living arrangements, and similar. We were also a little cautious that perhaps not everyone would welcome more unsolicited contact, especially if they did not know the person making it very well.

On balance, we decided to take the following steps: We put together an update message that we sent to all members that we held an email address for. If you didn't receive it, and you have a current email address, please get in touch at contact@absp.org.uk,

so we can ensure we have the most up-to-date information for you.

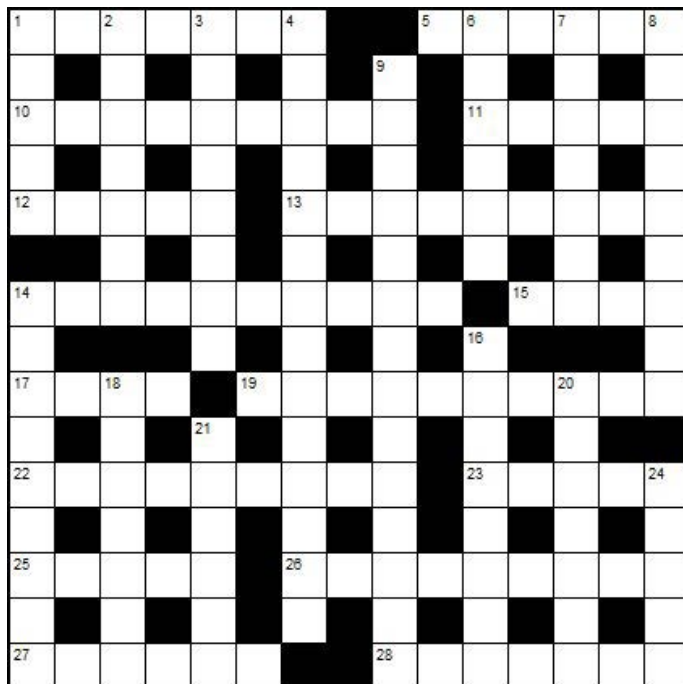
We also had 24 members for whom we did not have any email address, and members of the committee are making telephone calls to each one, to update them on what's happening and see if there is any interest in getting them online. There is a small number of members we did not have any contact details for, but we are attempting to check on those as well via any known friends or associates.

As part of this process, I made six telephone calls, mostly to players I did not know, and no two calls were the same, really. Some were very short, and other members took the opportunity to have a good old natter about shared friends or the ongoing pandemic. However, without exception, they seemed to appreciate the update on some level, and this has been replicated throughout the other calls we have made, too.

We would encourage anybody to check in on any more distant Scrabble friends they may have, members or otherwise, and please, if you do so, let them know about some of things we are doing online, just in case their situation may be different from that anticipated. Our online tournaments have already brought in a few new members, as well as luring back a couple of more historic ones. □

Cryptic crossword puzzle

By Alberich



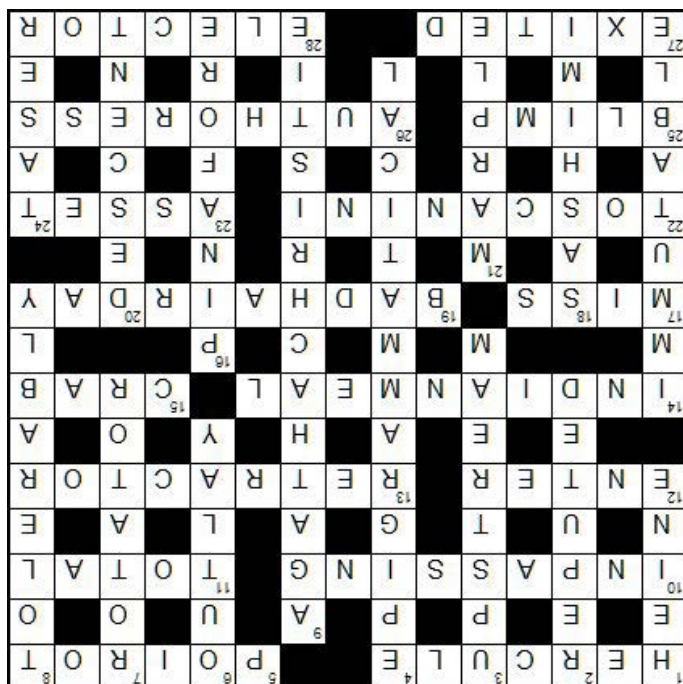
ACROSS

- 1,5 9's creation in devious book uncovered culprit here (7,6)
- 5 See 1 across
- 10 Associate nips off to confess, incidentally (2,7)
- 11 The whole lot backed keeping reserves once (5)
- 12 Record books guarded by uninitiated porter? (5)
- 13 Muscle in on farm equipment (9)
- 14 Ground maize or curry? (6,4)
- 15 Butler maybe goes after cold seafood (4)
- 17,21 Staggered as case of murder simple for 9's creation (4,6)
- 19 Away on vacation, a bird had dreadful time when everything went wrong? (3,4,3)
- 22 Conductor of opera with name in Italy (9)
- 23 A small group makes a strong point (5)
- 25 Reactionary sort's beginning to become flabby (5)
- 26 Novel out, she's a writer, finally? (9)
- 27 No section was left (6)
- 28 Constituent of e-reader (7)

DOWN

- 1 He embodies a German poet? (5)
- 2 Thought about Edward pocketing deposit (7)
- 3 Against the current United side following afterthought about Rooney's header (8)
- 4 Impressive work, mostly well-formed and pointed (14)
- 6 Apply more than others, presumably, for expenses (6)
- 7 It can turn either way (7)
- 8 Fairly poor returns in tax year (9)
- 9 Somehow one has a great itch to become crime writer (6,8)
- 14 I am a stubborn sort involving the bill - that can't be changed (9)
- 16 A dress fastener previously (8)
- 18 Airline's given him single fare from Japan (7)
- 20 Son's among fairly good ancestry (7)
- 21 See 17
- 24 Jack embraces extremely seductive stunner (5)

Solution



Puzzle Solutions



ANAGRID 1 ANSWER

	F	E	S	T	I	E	R		N	E	T	E	S			
G	U	T	T	E	R	S			I	O	N	O	N	E	S	
I	L	I	A	C	I			A	L	T	E	R	A	N	T	
S	H	O	T	T	S				L	O	R	I	C	A	E	
M	A	L	E	I	C			F	A	U	V	E	T	T	E	
S	M	A	L	T	O	S			P	R	E	S	S	E	R	
			T	E	E	P	E	E	S						E	
T	Z	E	T	S	E	S			I	C	H	A	B	O	D	
W								T	I	N	L	I	K	E		
Y	A	R	D	A	G	E			G	A	R	I	A	L	S	
E	M	E	E	R	A	T	E			S	U	N	K	I	E	
R	E	V	I	S	I	T				S	D	E	I	G	N	
E	L	I	C	I	T	O	R			M	I	S	E	A	T	
S	I	L	E	N	T	S				T	A	N	I	S	T	S
	A	E	D	E	S				S	E	N	S	A	T	E	

ANAGRID 2 ANSWER

X	Y	L	O	G	E	N		G		Y		M		F		
	G		C		V			C	E	L	I	B	A	T	E	
O	L	E	C	R	A	N	O	N		E		N		A		
	A		U		C			N	I	E	L	L	I	S	T	
J	U	M	P	S	U	I	T	S		D		C		E		
	N		I		A			E	T	H	A	N	O	L	S	
A	S	B	E	S	T	I	N	E		B		T		T		
	T	O	R	R	E	N	T	I	A	L	I	T	I	T	Y	
F		X			I			S	I	N	T	E	R	I	E	R
L	I	T	E	R	A	T	O			T		R		S		
A		H			A			R	U	R	A	L	I	S	T	S
R	H	O	N	C	H	U	S			I		S		R		
I		R		H		C	L	A	N	G	O	R	E	D		
N	O	N	F	A	T	T	Y			T		R		E		
G		S		S		S		S		E	S	P	Y	I	N	G

CRYPTOGRAM 1 ANSWER

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
A	Q	J	C	T	V	R	N	F	Y	Z	L	W
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
E	O	H	S	P	I	M	X	K	G	D	U	B

CRYPTOGRAM 2 ANSWER

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
T	X	C	K	F	Y	Z	M	Q	A	B	E	N
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
W	V	U	S	D	J	H	I	G	P	O	R	L

Answers to Quiz on page 26

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1 Arsenic | 11 Aneurin |
| 2 Cortina | 12 Sliotar |
| 3 Hairnet | 13 Roulade |
| 4 Oranges | 14 Petunia |
| 5 Neutral | 15 Erudite |
| 6 Goalies | 16 Guineas |
| 7 Oregano | 17 Dearest |
| 8 Fairest | 18 Operate |
| 9 Eternal | 19 Bornite |
| 10 Smartie | 20 Trainer |

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O-3 P-2 Z-1
N-2 Q-1
I-9 R-6
BLANK-2



OFFICIAL SCORE SHEET

PLAYER 1		PLAYER 2	
NO.	SCORE	NO.	SCORE
1		1	
2		2	
3		3	
4		4	
5		5	
6		6	
7		7	
8		8	
9		9	
10		10	
11		11	
12		12	
13		13	
14		14	
15		15	
16		16	
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