

24 hour chessathon report

Carl Portman. I played chess for 24 hours at the Castle Quay Shopping Centre in Banbury on the weekend of 24/25 November 2012. I was raising money for the Cardiac Physiology Fund at the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals.

I am a patient of the Implanted Cardioverter Device (ICD) clinic and wanted to raise funds for future patients.

I had the idea of 'Hearts and Minds' because when people have problems with their hearts that incapacitate them physically for days, months and sometimes even for life I wanted people to be aware that they could keep their brain active and that using chess as one of the greatest mind games ever will be of great benefit.

I use my love of chess as the vehicle to do this and the Management at Castle Quay Shopping Centre were very generous in granting me the free use of a unit for the event.



HEARTS AND MINDS CHESSATHON

I decided to collect donations using two simple methods. The first was online and I set up a page at the justgiving website which can be found at:

<http://www.justgiving.com/Carl-Portman>

and I also collected using a plastic bucket at the event. My target was £500 which I believe was realistic given the austere times we are living in and the amount of requests for donations to many other charities at this time of year. I am absolutely delighted to say that I have exceeded that. At the time of writing (the afternoon of the day of the event) I have some £577 pledged online with £235.83 on the day. My hope is that there will be some late donations to try to make £1000.



An ICD in position

I had several players scheduled to play me plus any members of the public who fancied a game as they passed by (and there were quite a few I am pleased to say). I had to complete the full 24 hours (of course) but my scheduled opponents would have a time slot.

24 hr CHESSATHON MONTAGE



Sue Portman (aka 'the wife') and Bob Dainty set it all up for me – thank you both! I absolutely could NOT have done this without you. Not bad at all for Baggies and Blues fans.



The event was opened by Sir Tony Baldry MP for North Oxfordshire. Sadly, he has little time for the game but still enjoys it when he can.



Me and Richard Beckett who was my first and last opponent – with a few protagonists in between!



The local constabulary even wished me well – what an arresting performance.



My neighbours supported me AND entered the arena of battle also – here's the evergreen (and super cyclist) Tony Skwirzynska.



A family affair – Nigel-Strachan Hall takes 'em all on! Go Nigel GO!!!



My good friend Seb Watkins turned up to show me some moves. He is nine years old – but don't be fooled; he shows no mercy at the board! Watch out for this lad in future...



My Cardiologist Dr. Timothy Betts and his chess playing son Charlie turned up to lend support and proved to be very worthy opponents. Here's a man who I was delighted to see from the other side of a chess board...and not a hospital bed!



He and Charlie gained a very creditable draw and here's the final position. White can simply keep checking me on the squares I have highlighted. Well done to you both. They were really good games.



And this is what it is all about. Raising funds for the **Cardiac Physiology Fund** and ICD's. Without people like Dr Betts, people like me would lead shorter lives. I cannot thank this man and his team (*including Nicola Meldrum, Elaine Watson and all the nursing staff*) enough. Should you have a life changing experience and wake up in hospital to see this man, rest assured that you simply could not be in better hands.



Next up for an hour was Georg Vikanis – board one at Banbury Chess club, an Aston Villa fan (I knew I liked the man) and a very talented chess player.

He was fast on the clock – like lightning in fact and we ended about even in the end after he had raced away to a 3-0 lead!



Neil Staples was kind enough to turn up and we enjoyed our usual brand of swashbuckling blitz chess. None of us understood what was happening at the board – as we don't in life 😊



This man takes the prizes for speed chess though. One of my most recent 'new' friends, Chris Evans arrived with energy, enthusiasm and a very dangerous chess repertoire. He was accompanied by...



... his wife Irene. She is also my very favourite Spanish lady. Thank you for the lovely food Irene, another triumph I believe. You bake the best cake in the world.



Thus it was left to Daniel Rowan to be my guest and opponent during the graveyard shift - 11pm to 8am. We enjoyed countless battles on the 64 squares that evening. Dan, thank you for volunteering the toughest of all shifts, I will never forget the Christmas music that accompanied us all night and the Thomas the Tank engine theme from the nearby shop but it was great fun and yes, we made it dear boy, we made it.



Richard returned for the last two hours to 'finish what he started' and close the event with me. We play chess often and know each other's game but never fail to delight in finding new ideas, and composing 'new symphonies' at the chessboard.

Incidentally I am wearing a coat in many of the photographs because I seem to feel the cold a lot of late. Strange but true! There was a forecast for snow an -15 degrees in the newspapers today as well!

I came through the 24 hours pretty well considering that I am supposed to get a good night's sleep with the heart condition I have.

When I got home I did not hit the bed immediately as I was still on a high and my brain was racing. Now it is all over and I must ensure that the money is paid to the hospital so they can get on with putting it to good use.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful and heartfelt thanks go to the following cast in this play.

The wife: Susan for her unstinting physical and moral support. I love you.

The Logistician (and friend): Bob Dainty for the logistics, the humour and the indefatigable 'can do' attitude that he always has. I am utterly indebted to you for your support.

The Venue: The Castle Quay Shopping Centre management team including Rebecca Deeley and Paul Jackson for kind permission to use a unit for the event. The night shift staff were always kind enough to check that we were okay ☺

The guests: Sir Tony Baldry MP for opening the event. My cardiologist Dr. Tim Betts for taking time out to turn up with his son Charlie and give me such tough and memorable battles at the board. Seb Watkins, one of Oxfordshire's ever improving Junior players who at 9 years old proves once again that age is no barrier to being a very good chess player.

The Official players: Richard Beckett, Gary Jackson, Nick Martin, Georg Vikanis, Chris Evans, Neil Staples and Dan Rowan for keeping

me occupied at the board. (Without any kind of compassion I would add). You came, you saw, you're bonkers.

The nice surprises: Irene's cake was so good I simply had to photograph it. You will only ever know what it looked like but I know how it tasted; and I am all the luckier for it. Irene, I am afraid I cannot remember what the other dish was but it involved ham and egg and was delicious. Dan was particularly partial to it.



Irene's cake!

The friends and neighbours: including Tony, Hazel and Alex (Magnus) Skwirzynska, Nigel and Elaine Strachan-Hall and their boys George and Oliver, and to Charles and Anne Sheppard for coming along and bringing big smiles and uplifting moral support.

The Media: Thank you to Hanna Ljunggren and the team at the Banbury Guardian, to Maureen Paterson and Bob Dainty at Horton Hospital Radio. Also thanks to the Banbury Community website and the English Chess Federation and Oxfordshire Chess web sites for support. My appreciation goes also to Malcolm Pein at 'Chess and Bridge' of London for donating copies of their monthly Chess magazines. Further thanks to Carron Dickson at Bray Leino for publicity work.

The Hospital:

Sarah Vaccari, Janet Sprake and Cynthia Charlett for showing me the way with charitable fundraising procedures. Also to Caroline Holmes at the Arrhythmia Alliance.

Corporate thanks

Staples of Banbury for printing the poster. Terry and Gill of T Shirt Solutions of Banbury, Samantha Hartwell at Banbury Town Hall for the loan of two good quality chairs (that saved some back ache) for the event.

And finally: To everyone who gave of their money whether online or in person. I can only applaud your generosity of spirit and your very kind deeds without which the whole concept would have been utterly pointless. If I have not mentioned you here I will simply have forgotten and I am sorry – I am getting older after all. Thank you.



ICD's Save lives

Further information on chess and hearts.

Hearts

I write a weekly blog on the ICD Forum which is read worldwide. It is called Carl's Sunday Sermon but it is not religious. Here you will find everything from events of the week, to poetry to serious matters of the heart. Just look under 'Main Forum 2012' on this page:

<http://www.icdsupportgroup.org/board/index.php>

I don't know how long my justgiving page will be up but if people still want to give or just see what it was all about the address is here:

<http://www.justgiving.com/Carl-Portman>

The Oxfordshire ICD group can be found here:

<http://www.buckinghamtwinning.org.uk/icdoxford/>

To raise funds for the John Radcliffe hospital go here:

<http://www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk/charity/charity.aspx>

Chess

The wonderful game of chess was the vehicle I used to highlight the fact that hearts may be broken but the mind is still very much capable of anything. If you want to learn to play or you already know and fancy visiting Banbury Chess Club then please do so. We welcome players of all standards. See our web site here:

<http://www.banburychessclub.co.uk/index.html>

Carpe diem

Carl 😊

This event is dedicated to Dr. Timothy Betts whose skill, professionalism and dedication to making all things better continues to resonate positively throughout the cardiac world and beyond...