ICCF Services Director’s Report to Congress, Bremen 2016

Austin Lockwood, ICCF Services Director, June 2016

Dear friends,

Since we last met in Cardiff, the Services Committee and our professional consultants have completed what has probably been our busiest and most productive year since the server first came online. The largest part of this work was related to rules updates arising primarily from the new Tournament Director’s manual.

There is no doubt that this work has significantly enhanced the server experience for both players and officials, however the resources available, both voluntary and professional, to the Services Committee have been severely stretched at times over the last twelve months.

Part of the problem has been that deadlines have been imposed. As well as the regular annual January deadline for rule changes, we also agreed to a further deadline in April.

Unfortunately, we are a small team; we depend mostly on volunteers and a small team of professional contractors. Although very flexible, we need to work around our contractors’ schedules and our volunteers’ commitments; with the ever increasing workload, there may be occasions when deadlines are unachievable.

Traditionally new rules are introduced on the first day of the year following Congress. We will *endeavour* to maintain this convention; however, Congress must accept that where a rule change involves a significant update to the server, we can no longer guarantee that this update will be in place within a particular time frame.

Furthermore, we have been in the position occasionally of implementing a server feature whilst the specification is unclear or incomplete, or is still under development; this has resulted in confusion and wasted time and money. For each of the accepted Congress proposals agreed in Bremen requiring a server update, work will not commence until the proposer has provided a detailed and final specification.

# Server Updates 2015/2016 (Phase 13)

The following Phase Thirteen items have been implemented since the Cardiff Congress.

* Require game score when setting a result for postal game
* 35% rule for title norms
* Add role filter to mailings
* Conditional Continuations
* Historically correct display of IA title on cross table
* Update to ASP.NET 4.6 RTM
* Change text that TD sees in complaint mode
* Change in rating rule 16
* Optional Sofia Rule
* Title Norm Application Process Changes
* Pin news items to the front page
* In multi group events, add the group to the breadcrumbs
* Appeals in national tournaments
* Add title column to rating history
* Remove popup messages
* Inactive TDs
* Revised Arbiters Manual Part 2
* Online voting system (Delegates Not Able to Attend Congress)
* Hall of fame
* Player bios
* Better UI for deleting a substituted player
* Draft status for system messages
* Add FIDE title to promotion games
* Recalculate rating history of a player
* National events must have the same defaults as ICCF events.
* Changes to ETL
* List of all adjudications
* Do not require an email address for players who died
* Hall of fame design
* Create a Class of Isolated Players
* Revision of Adjudication Procedures
* Make Code of Conduct draw rule mandatory for ICCF events.
* Give WTD access to the delete player option in the withdrawal wizard
* Suspensions in case of substitutions
* Automation of "Document of Withdrawal"
* Email all players should not disclose email addresses
* Include non-server games in games archive
* Update rules text for autoflag and code of conduct rules
* RC can set any result in any game
* Cannot delete a game if it is a promotion game, has adjudications, or claims
* Add link to cross table or game to email notifications
* General secretary should be able to edit the proposal number if proposal is in status submitted
* Summary of the games' status on team event cross table
* Non gender specific version of ladies titles
* Automation of adjudication of games
* Revised Arbiters Manual
* Improvements to pending titles
* Consolidate database access technologies
* Show norms on pending titles list
* Add FIDE title display to promotion games on front page
* Postal archive
* Updated TD role based on new arbiter's manual
* Synchronize achievements
* Hide old registrations from registrations list
* Tables and results: Move search field to the top
* The admin can set a result in a game pending adjudication (to solve any remaining issues regarding adjudications)
* Send mailings to adjudicators
* Add group winners to list of groups of multi-group event
* Text change while making a claim about penalties for invalid claims
* Trusted user should get a warning when changing another user's email address to a duplicate
* Add team names and link to cross table to start list emails
* Search for player or ICCF ID on the registrations list
* Registrations list changes

# Phase 13 tasks carried over to Phase 14

We were unable to implement the following Phase 13 items, and these have been carried over to Phase 14.

* Add running games to forecast
* Embeddable version of game screen
* Replay a game even if it is your turn
* Improved game replay
* DE role: can edit event registration tab of all events
* ICCF vouchers
* Conform to EU cookie law
* Include player messages in Xfcc
* Further security improvements

# Proposed New Tasks for Phase 14

The following items have been proposed and prioritised by the Services Committee at our April meeting in Stuttgart, Germany.

* Automatically set the result to “Cancelled” in games without a move
* Drawing screen for team tournaments
* Responsive design for specific pages
* Team captain can see all games
* Support browser history on Tables and Results
* Improvements to error screen
* Security: Protect against Cross Site Request Forgery
* Multi group international title tournaments
* Multi group events: Option for rolling/parallel events
* Automatically recognize pending GM titles
* Globalize achievements tab on player details
* Use mouse wheel to replay a game
* Add deletion of old files to backup script
* Changes to QC privileges
* Review of roles
* Main sponsor banner changes
* Clarify behaviour with multiple withdrawals in one tournament
* Clarify if check whether player has finished a game "by playing" still corresponds to the rules
* Multiple withdrawal cases
* Remove team viewing rules

# Silli System

At the request of the Italian federation, the 2015 Congress approved the development of an option to run tournaments using the Silli system on the server.

Unfortunately, due to the volume of other work, there was simply no time to complete this project.

Implementing the Silli System on the server remains a Priority One item for Phase 14.

I personally apologise to ASIGC, and other federations intending to use the Silli System for their tournaments, for this delay.

# Congress Proposals 2016

Each of the 2016 Congress proposals are listed below, including an evaluation of the proposal by the Services Committee where appropriate, and an estimate of the cost of implementing the proposal where possible. The quoted estimates include development, testing, and overhead and are based on feedback from our external consultants, Martin Bennedik and Neil Limbert.

## 2016-002 Adjudicating Deceased Players' Games

The cost of implementing this proposal, including automatic tablebase evaluation, and changes in the adjudication process is estimated at €318.00

## 2016-004 Clarification of Tournament Rule 10.4c

As this is simply a proposal to clarify the rules, no direct development costs are implied.

However, if Congress accepts this proposal, it will allow us to program the server to recognise pending GM titles in the same way that other titles are currently recognised; this is a current outstanding work item which we have not been able to implement because of the difficulties described by the proposal.

Furthermore, Proposal 2016-019 cannot be implemented without this proposal first being accepted.

## 2016-008 Applying Consistent Rules to Friendly Matches

If Congress accepts this proposal, it will be necessary to make some minor changes to the event validation procedures. The total cost of this is estimated at €159.00

## 2016-009 New Tournament Organizer (TO) Manual

The following server features would be implemented and tested:

* Restrictions on the TD not being the TO.
* “I have read the manual” button for TOs.

The estimated cost of implanting the above items is €552.00

Balancing multi group events is considered in other work items, these items have Priority Two and are pending a complete specification; Implementation of these is not part of this estimate.

## 2016-010 National Federation Opt-Out of ICCF Adjudication System

The fact that a member federation delegate feels the need to make this proposal is further evidence (if any more is needed) that the current ICCF server time control is no longer fit for purpose for the rhythm of modern server play.

The problems described by EFCC are shared by ICCF and by many other federations; The Services Committee do not believe that the answer lies in fragmenting the rules by creating different conditions for national and international play (EFCC having an “opt out clause” will not solve the problems of extreme delays in Olympiads or Champions League seasons). If ICCF ratings and titles are indeed to be considered the hallmark of international correspondence chess, then we should be applying the same standards to ***all*** rated games, national and international.

Our hope is that the problems described by EFCC will be fully alleviated by the introduction of the Triple-Block Time control system and that it will not be necessary for delegates to vote on this proposal.

If, however, this proposal is accepted by Congress, it would be necessary to add an option *“Automated ICCF Adjudications”* for national events; the cost of implementing this is estimated at €318.00

## 2016-011 GDP Based Fee Structure for Developing Nations

Following discussions with the ICCF Finance Director, no changes to the Direct Entry process or associated software are anticipated should this proposal be accepted by delegates. There is, therefore, no technical cost associated with the proposal.

## 2016-012 Allow Changes to Playing Rules - Server Only Once in 2-Years

The cost of implementing this proposal is difficult to estimate, however there is no reason to believe that any money would be saved because presumably there would be twice as much work to complete in alternate years.

It is already rather difficult to complete a single year of rules changes between Congress and the start of the following calendar year. To implement two years of accumulated changes in the same period would present a challenge for the Services Committee.

Furthermore, the Services Committee dispute the assertion that the rules are stable and that changes are “back and forth”. Server based correspondence chess is evolving rapidly, and it is only in the last three or four years that ICCF have come to view server CC as a game in its own right rather than a proxy for postal chess. We are just beginning to explore the possibilities, and this is reflected by recent innovations such as automated claim handling and tablebase lookups. The Services Committee believe that to artificially stifle this evolution by limiting rule changes would be a barrier to progress.

## 2016-015 Revised Norm Calculations

To implement this proposal, it would be necessary to develop and test the following items:

Implement norm calculation for each player according to new rules, including rounding

Change norm calculation when starting a tournament, or when replacing / substituting

* Store norms per player in the database
* Display new norms per player in start list emails
* Display new norms per player on cross tables
* Change check if norm achieved (or unachieved)
* Use new norms during calculation of overscoring when checking for title achieved
* Edit category and norms: norms cannot be edited
* Display new norms on the list of norms screen
* Display new norms on the player norms tab
* Display the norms on the list of title tournaments?
* Support the old norms for previous tournaments in all of these cases

The estimated cost of this is €2,430.00

It should be noted that this change to the way that norms are calculated is meaningless unless Congress also accept Proposal 2016-017 (Revised Ratings Rules). Furthermore, if Congress decide to proceed with the proposed evaluation of the Glicko Rating System and eventually adopt the system, we have been given assurances by Professor Glickman that this change in the way that norms are calculated will be fully compatible with his rating system.

## 2016-016 Minimum Opponent Rating for Norms

There are no cost implications of this proposal, because a minimum condition for achieving norms will necessarily be implemented if 2016-015 is accepted anyway; this proposal simply asks delegates to select one of two options.

## 2016-017 Revised Rating Rules

The following work would need to be completed:

* Re-implement rating calculation, scoring probability, and rating difference with new formulas and rounding specification
* Update display of rating calculation
* Ensure forecast matches rating calculation
* Support previous rating calculations for prior rating lists

The estimated cost of implementing this work is €1,728.00

It is anticipated that testing would be completed by members of the Services Committee (in particular, the Ratings Commissioner), so there would be no associated professional testing cost.

## 2016-019 Revising Tournament Rule 10.10

To implement this proposal, it would be necessary to update the server to automatically recognise and award title achievements; much of this work is already completed with the “pending titles” list implemented in 2016 (titles are automatically added to the “pending” list, but require final confirmation by the Qualifications Commissioner before being awarded); implementing the final stage would incur an estimated cost of €318.00

## 2016-022 Evaluation of the Glicko Rating System

The evaluation of the Glicko Rating System would be conducted by members of the Services Committee, so there would be no professional software development or testing costs.

Professional statistical consultation costs are detailed in the proposal.

## 2016-024 Adjudication of Games of a Deceased Player

Unfortunately, the implementation this proposal is impossible to evaluate, the proposal itself appears to be disconnected from the abstract and the estimated effort.

The aims outlined in the abstract (correcting the situation where won games are adjudicated as draws) are not addressed by the proposal; furthermore, there are references to tablebase adjudications in the effort section which are not mentioned in the proposal.

## 2016-027 GM Title Norms Recognition in Previous Tournaments

The Services Committee envisage this as being a manual process (the server already supports norms manually added by the Qualifications Commissioner), so there are no technical development costs.

## 2016-028 New Time Control System - Server-Based Games: Triple-Block System

Implementing the Triple Block time control system would require extensive programming and testing work; we estimate the cost of this work at €6,810.00

However, the long term savings implied by Triple Block are considerable; the current convoluted time control options (including leave, duplication, rounding of days, special leave, etc.) require extensive testing each time a change is made. Because of the simplification of the proposed new system, the long term cost would be negative compared with maintaining the current system.

## 2016-034 Fixed Start Dates of ICCF Olympiads Final and Preliminaries

The Triple Block time control system would guarantee a four year Olympiad cycle, please see notes above.

## 2016-035 Software Mastering

In order to implement this proposal, a new rule would be added to the tournament setup screen “end games immediately on reaching a tablebase position”; if this option were selected, all games would be automatically ended by the server on reaching six pieces. It may be necessary to review our commercial agreement with our current providers as the number of requests sent to the tablebase server would increase.

The estimated cost of implementation is €636.00

## 2016-036 Identify ICCF players by Database Number in Cases of Similar/Identical Names

Although there is no technical work implied by the proposal, it would be possible to add ICCF IDs to downloaded PGN files and game archives; this may be an alternative solution to the problem described by the proposer. The cost of implementing this would be €72.00

## 2016-038 Use Only the Standard 26 Roman Alphabet Letters A-Z in Player Names

This proposal appears to be motivated by the presence of a bug in an older version of ChessBase; the Services Committee suggest working with ChessBase to find a solution rather than making unnecessary and potentially offensive changes to the ICCF database.

(The most common surname in the largest ICCF federation, Germany, is Müller – currently there are 76 players with this name in the database. In Bremen we will have delegates named Ljubičić, Mrkvička, Ylönen, Ročius, Bendaña Guerrero, Rösch, Šemrl and Söderberg.)

## 2016-041 Chess Board at Disposal of Each Federation for Propagandistic Reasons

The Services Committee welcome this proposal; it is indeed very important for federations to welcome new players and to give them information about ICCF and using the server. Following discussions with the proposer we have reached the following specification assuming the proposal is accepted as written:

*A federation official needs to be able to start a special kind of game. This game is between a "guest" user (the player does not need to have a registered account) and the official starting the game - the game is unrated and will last for no more than ten moves. The game does not need to be saved in the database after it has completed. There should be an introductory video embedded on the page.*

It has been established that the video content will be provided by the Italian federation.

Unfortunately, the specification was received too late for an estimation of cost to be made; furthermore, the Services Committee believe that some refinement of the specification is required before it can be implemented (providing anonymous accounts will be problematic).

Should Proposal 21016-041 be accepted, we ask Congress for flexibility to modify the proposal in consultation with the Italian federation and the ICCF Marketing Director.

## 2016-044 Modification of Proposal Process

The estimated cost of modifying the congress database to meet the requirements of this proposal is €246.00

## 2016-047 Time Control for World Championship 30 Final

It would require a very minor server update to facilitate the proposed time control (allow up to 400 days’ initial time, and allow zero duration increments). The estimated cost is €132.00

# Helpdesk Report

Approximately 200 help desk questions were received over the twelve-month period since last Congress, this represented a slight decrease since the same period last year; possibly explained by the increased level of server automation.

Enquiries were generally replied to within twenty-four hours; many of these were forwarded to the responsible tournament director or national delegate.

Delegates and officials should be aware, and communicate to players, that the purpose of the helpdesk is to resolve technical issues directly with players; it is not a general triage for all ICCF enquiries. General enquiries to ICCF should be routed through national delegates, zonal directors, or tournament directors in the first instance.

Thanks are again due to the helpdesk distribution list of Gino Figlio, Jason Bokar, Ian Pheby, Markus Hömske and Russell Sherwood.

# Help files/Documentation

I am pleased to report that Dr Ambar Chatterjee (IND) has been working on an informative online help system for players.

# Budget

Given that there are some potentially high cost updates required, depending on the decisions of Congress, I ask delegates to approve a development budget for Phase 14 of €20,000.

# Acknowledgements

I am again grateful for the confidence and support offered to me by all ICCF players, delegates and officials over the past year. I am particularly grateful for the support of my deputy, Gino Figlio, and all other members of the ICCF Services Committee, who participate fully in the important work of the committee, including responding to helpdesk requests, giving feedback on new server features, and acceptance testing.

I am also grateful for the high quality of services offered by our professional contractors, Martin Bennedik and Neil Limbert.

*Rydym yn Ffrindiau – Amici Sumus*

*Austin Lockwood, Cyfarwyddwr Gwasanaethau ICCF*

*Manceinion, Mehefin 2016*

# Appendix I (Services Committee 2016/17)

**Chair:** Austin Lockwood WLS (Services Director)

**Ex officio:** Gino Figlio PER (Deputy Services Director), Eric Ruch FRA (ICCF President), Michael Millstone USA (ICCF General Secretary).

**Commissioners:** Gerhard Binder GER (Ratings Commissioner), Mariusz Wojnar POL (Qualifications Commissioner).

**Other:** Dennis Doren USA, Ian Pheby ENG, Andrew Dearnley ENG, Frank Geider FRA, Thomas Biedermann USA. Other ICCF officers to be co-opted on an ad-hoc basis for consultation and acceptance testing when appropriate.

**Professional Consultation:** Martin Bennedik GER (development), Neil Limbert ENG (testing).