

## FIDE Olympiad Online 2021 Tournament Report – Australia

Back in July I was bestowed the honour, by the ACF, of managing and captaining a talented Australian team for the 2021 FIDE Online Olympiad, which took place during August on Chess.com and Zoom, with over 150 countries in participation.

The team comprised of twelve players and reserves selected to represent Open, Women, Girls and Boys (U18) boards. Each round Australia was to field six players (2 Open, 2 Women's, 1 Boy and 1 Girl) in a round robin rapid format against other countries in our pool. With a time control of 15+5 seconds, we knew speed under pressure would determine many results and Olympiad veteran Grandmaster Zong-Yuan Zhao, made a point of this during our team warmup tournament.

Australia began the tournament in the second division and was seeded into a tough pool A alongside nine other teams, including favourites Shenzhen China (a Chinese second team added because of being the 'online hosts') as well as Indonesia. With Australia positioned as the third seed, and only three qualifying spots for the top division, we set out with the goal of trying to beat each team seeded below us in our matches.

In round 1 we trounced the 4<sup>th</sup> seeded Bangladesh but fell agonisingly short against the Philippines in round 2, losing the match 4-2. We finished day 1 strongly with a win against Taipei and proceeded to beat Lebanon 6-0, and Singapore 3.5-2.5 in the match of the round by clutching up on junior boards. Albert Winkelman and Jody Middleton both won their games from worse positions with next to no time on the clock! After this round we lost heavily to Indonesia 5-1 in what would prove to be a result that would seemingly doom our ambitions of qualification.

With pressure mounting on the Australian team, needing to win all our final three matches, we defeated Ireland, lost to Kyrgyzstan by half a point and then couldn't quite get in the match against Shenzhen, who fielded 2400 players on almost all their boards including juniors!

This left Australia in 4<sup>th</sup> place and out of qualifying behind Indonesia, Shenzhen China, and surprise packet the Philippines. However, the Philippines were mysteriously disqualified over the following days for fair play issues, which almost certainly cost Australia a win against them in our match. I was contacted by chief arbiter IA Alex Holowczak two days before the top division was to start and informed that Australia would indeed be playing.

We were seeded into Pool A of the top division and realised quickly we would be coming up against chess powerhouses including China, fronted by GM's Ding Liren (world #2), Wei Yi (world #24), Hou Yifan and Ju Wenjun (yes, the current women's world champion was only their second-best women's player), Kazakhstan, Armenia and Iran to name a few.

Australia entered this stage of the tournament feeling very little pressure and performed far better than expected. In round 1 we faced the dreaded Chinese team and despite going down 5.5-5 it was an incredible performance. Every single board had Australia in slightly better positions right down until the last minutes. Australian champion GM Temur Kuybokarov was the only player to convert a result , drawing with ex-prodigy GM Wei Yi.

Despite being heavily outrated in this pool Australia did manage to score some excellent team and individual results. In round 4 we knocked over a competitive Georgian team, with both of our Women's boards leading the team to victory. WGM Jilin Zhang and WFM Thu Giang Nguyen both overcame IM's to make this happen.

Round 6 was the biggest upset of the event with Australia drawing 3-3 with world #5 country Armenia. Again, our women's boards, WGM Julia Ryjanova and WFM Mai Chi Phan won their games as well as GM Zong-Yuan Zhao who used his trusty London system to pounce on board 2.

Australia did finish at the bottom of the division as expected however it can be said that several players achieved remarkable scores. Temur scored 4/7, better than a half score against the best board 1's from around the world and his results in the second division was one of the best results I've seen on the top board by Australia at Olympiads. Moulthun Ly scored 3/4 playing on board 2 of the Open's, and Zong-Yuan Zhao and Jilin Zhang both put up half scores of 2.5/5 against their highly rated oppositions.

Full results can be found at the link below:

<https://chess-results.com/tnr577516.aspx?lan=1&art=1&flag=30>

The Australian performance was well received and covered extensively by an official broadcast on Twitch by entertaining 'Melbourners' Frank Hakakavic, IM James Morris and FM Jack Puccini on their Twitch channel 'DegenChess'.

It was an absolute pleasure to help this Australian team find success and the players represented the country with the utmost level of fighting spirit and bravado. I hope to be involved in future Australian endeavours as I can see a bright future ahead as we return to over the board chess and probably upset many more topflight Olympiad teams over the coming years.

Jack Rodgers,

Australian team Captain/Manager

