



Chess tournament participants (L-R) Afolarin Oyeleke (26), Joseph Wilson (20), Benjamin Abakpereh (26), Godson Obikoru (27)

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West Midlands Railway hosts UK's first chess tournament on a train

West Midlands Railway (WMR) has today (18 July) hosted the UK's first chess tournament on board a moving train ahead of International Chess Day, which takes place this weekend.

Passengers boarding the 10:36 service from Birmingham New Street to Lichfield Trent Valley were greeted by the contest held on one of WMR's Class 730 electric trains.

Eight chess players went head-to-head in three rounds over the course of the two-hour return journey, which culminated in a tense final where Paddy Mulvey (24) was named the winner.

All players were selected by chesscafé (@chesscafebrum), a fortnightly social night in central Birmingham that brings together chess, music, and coffee. They earned their spot in today's event through a qualifying tournament held during one of the sessions.

Jonny Wiseman, WMR customer experience director, said: "The introduction of our Class 730 fleet onto the Cross City line last year brought modern features such as intelligent air-con, Wi-Fi and open gangways for a spacious feel.

"One thing we wanted to shine a spotlight on today is the addition of tables, which weren't available in the previous fleet. Our passengers can use these tables for more than checking emails. Bring along a sketchbook, pack of cards or - in this case - a chess set and make the most of your journey on board."

International Chess Day is celebrated on Sunday (20 July) to commemorate the founding of the International Chess Federation.

Karan Singh, co-founder of chesscafé, said: "We started chesscafé as a third-space for people to connect offline, something relaxed and social, especially for us young people navigating digital fatigue post-lockdown.

Abdirahim Haji, co-founder of chesscafé, said: "We were excited to partner with West Midlands Railway on hosting this tournament, and we hope this inspires more people to pick up the game, whether it's in a park, at a coffee shop, or even on their commute."

The Class 730 fleet came into service in 2024 serving the Cross City line, as well as routes between Birmingham International and Rugeley, and between Wolverhampton and Walsall.

The trains include modern features including four-seater tables, smart air conditioning, Wi-Fi, power points at every seat and improved accessibility. There are a total of 48 trains in the fleet - the specific train used for today's chess tournament was unit number 730017, coupled with 730019.

chesscafé was co-founded by Abdirahim Haji and Karan Singh in 2025 and offers a space for young people to socialise and play chess in a relaxed café setting.

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