

WBC 2013

Britannia Tournament

Reported by Jim Jordan

Time once more to wax histrionic, or historic, or whatever, it's time for the yearly narration of the WBC Britannia Tournament. Sadly, the younger generation was not as well represented this year, but we had many veterans show up. As with last year, the competition was extremely tight. It's getting harder and harder to manage a three hundred point game and everyone has a laser like focus on keeping the leaders in line. I am quite proud to see it. Balance and finesse are what Britannia is all about. Oh, and manipulating your opponents like crazy!

Before launching into the heats, let me first thank Ewan McNay and Randy Schilb. While serving as my assistant GMs, they also volunteered to play dual games during the heats so that I wouldn't have to. We had two of the three heats with just one short of the right numbers, but we got everyone playing! Go team!

It was another year without one point wins, although there were some tight games, including one adjudicated game that had to be resolved in a dice off. The closest win awards this year were taken by Greg Hultgren in the first round at 241/222 with Red. The second round went to Nick Benedict with a 237/222 with Green. I took the third round with the closest win of the heats at 251/248 with Blue as Ewan gave a very strong run for it even though he was playing two games!

The color finishes in the heats tilted towards Red and Yellow this year, with both of those colors scoring four wins. Blue and Green were not out of it though as Blue had three wins and Green two. Adding the semi-finals into the mix though gives a beautiful spread to the wins. We had three semi-final games; Blue took one while Green took two. So of the 16 games before the final the colors were perfectly divided at four wins apiece! I do believe that's the first time that's ever happened. And then Green took the final. But I get ahead of myself.

Before I launch into the final though, I will now present the high score awards and a couple of memorable items from the heats.

In the heats, first, Mark Smith sitting watching in amazement as his Picts and Angles both evaporated by about turn 10. He was left with just waiting for those Normans to arrive. And, apparently, this was the year where, if your name was O'Connor, skill and favorable dice gods met, and the wins rolled in. Between Matt and Ed, they won five games in the heats and the semi-final, with Ed being the only person winning a game in each of the three heats!

The high score awards were fiercely competitive this year and the high scores keep falling as folks get a better feel for balancing out the games. There were definitely no 300 point winners this time around! This year we had our highest of the high scores in

Red, as happens frequently happens, with Greg Hultgren posting a 274 in the second heat. Green was next on the list with a 271 by your GM also in the second heat. Moving on down, we had Ewan McNay pulling together 260 points with Yellow. And coming up at the bottom, as usual, the Blue high score, also by your GM, came in at 251 points. The Ethelraed the Unraed award went to Barry Smith with a score of 183 with Blue in a game where Red won with a score of 241 points. Barry's Angles ran into strong opposition followed by his Normans being crushed and only hanging onto one space at the end of the game.

And now we'll go on to the final game. We only had 3 semi-final games this year, so it would be the three winners and the closest second place finisher going into the final. The three winners were Matt O'Connor, winning handily in a crazy game with Greg and Ewan taking each other out. Randy Schilb was next, squeezing out a bare five point victory over Nick Benedict. And last was Woolly Farrow, edging out your GM by four points in a tight game where Rick Kirchner was only another two points behind.

The cards came out and Matt drew Yellow, I had Green, Randy Red, and Woolly Blue. We immediately started out at a blistering game play pace.

Matt's Romans invaded in fine form and with little opposition. My Welsh ran for the hills and submitted. Meanwhile, the Belgae were squeezed back to their usual corner and the Romans were heading up to take out a couple of initial Brigantes. The Brigantes did sting the Romans as did the Belgae, but it was just those two Romans lost in the initial drive.

Boudicca's Belgae did a nice job with their rebellion, scoring 20 points in the first round taking out two more legions and a fort, but not seriously denting the Roman drive. The Brigantes attempted to takeout some Romans, but only succeeded in losing several armies for their efforts before retiring to await their fate.

Boudicca's rebellion was then crushed with little effort by the Romans, losing only one more legion for their troubles. One lone Belgae was left in Lindsey to cause trouble later. Meanwhile, the Brigantes were quickly deciding that submission was the best policy. The Romans were delayed enough though that even though they easily submitted the Picts, they did so leaving the Picts with five areas to spread out in.

A couple of uneventful turns later, the Romans wrapped up with 142 points for a tidy invasion and Matt's Romano-British positioned themselves in the Downlands and a scattering of other areas as usual.

Randy's Saxons rolled in on turn 6 and went after the R-Bs with more than the usual panache. The Romano-British were almost entirely eliminated during the invasion except for a couple of holdouts in Lindsey. Meanwhile the Saxons lost a few of their warriors and spread out to occupy the lowlands, making a deal with my Jutes to graciously allow them to stay in Kent until turn 7. The Brigantes and the Irish were both in reasonable shape waiting for Woolly's Angles to come aboard.

Matt's Scots came aboard turn 7 to stiff resistance from the Picts and only managed to hold the west coast of Scotland. Meanwhile the Picts maintained a strong position in the rest of Scotland not occupied by the Caledonians. Woolly's Angle invasion fared rather better than the Scots, pulling in a decent 26 points while submitting the Brigantes and establishing a stable base in the north of England without overreaching.

The usual quick 8th and 9th turns were only noticeable for the complete lack of Bretwaldas as the opposing sides carefully counted territories. In addition, my Welsh were denied York by Woolly's Angles, who maintained their numbers by not dueling heavily with the Randy's Saxons. Turn 10's scoring round kept the same equilibrium with the only point of note coming when the Matt's Scots did manage to even up the territory count in Scotland and grab Dunedin for equal points with the Woolly's Picts. And so we moved into the late game with everyone in the running and lots of on par numbers.

Things started to get interesting for my Greens on Turn 11. Randy's Norse came ashore and barely noticed as they brushed aside my Caledonian's from their island homes. Caithness was the only holdout. To add insult to injury, my "mighty" Danes came ashore to raid and were slaughtered on the beaches. After losing half their numbers, they managed to score only two raiding points. The prospects for a massive Danish invasion were small indeed.

So here we were, turn 12 started with a bunch of pretty even scores. Yellow at 168, Green at 128, Red at 103 and Blue at 122. All the scores were a bit lower since the Bretwalda and King possibilities had been avoided by the Blue-Red détente. My Greens looked a bit low with the whacking the Danes and Caledonians got, but there were plenty of Welsh. Randy's Reds had huge Saxons and the Brigantes and Norse had strong forces left, but the Irish had been wiped out.

There was minimal maneuvering pre-Danes other than some Welsh aggression. The Saxons and Angles had already pulled back to their defensive postures. The Danes came on in modest fashion, sticking firmly to the plan of establishing a center around Lindsey. Given their limited numbers, the 24 points scored weren't bad given that there were only about 9 Danes left. At least Lindsey, Norfolk, Suffolk and North Mercia were occupied, along with a loner in York.

With the Saxons at hefty numbers though, they easily took the King points for turn 12 and looked set up to score big on turn 13.

With the Dubliners coming on and the Norse raiders still looking for points, turn 13 continued relatively static. The Dubliners rolled in and dented the Angles and, given the weakness of the Danes, decided that York looked like a good deal. Sadly for them, the Angles took back Cumbria. To make matters worse for Matt's Yellows, the Scots lost another territory to the Norse. Meanwhile, the Saxons continued to use their numbers to their advantage, taking another Kingship and a very tidy 39 points for the turn. The

Angles had been severely shrunken and managed only 14 points, while the Welsh scored 20 points, as many as as the Caledonians and Danes together.

Turn 14 the Danes got some of their own back as Cnut managed to somehow pull off the Kingship in the face of a lot of Saxons. Of course, the Saxons then turned around and took the Kingship right back.

Turn 15, the board was a bit thin for all the King conflicts so Matt's Norwegians and Woolly's Normans looked to do fairly well. But the 65 points scored by Randy's Reds on turn 13, plus the Kingship on Turn 14 made Red appear to be the front-runner, influencing the actions of the board. The Norwegians came on with a very standard turn, losing a couple, but easily bagging their 28 points and forting up in Bernicia.

The Normans had a harder time of it. Even though the Saxon had been hit severely by the Danes, there were still a lot of them. The Normans came on and started losing troops right away. They decided to take the conservative approach then and went west through Avalon, only netting 18 points for turn 15. It was a death tango with the Saxons though with both sides losing significant numbers and Harold looking vulnerable going into Turn 16.

And with turn 16, the tide started turning Green. The Welsh rolled out of Wales and secured most of England just the other side of their border. The Caledonians actually managed to take a space from the Picts on pure luck and the Danes spread out and sacrificed to their gods for mercy. The Picts and Scots were down then, with the Scots and Picts each in two areas but the Norse looking good. And then they mutually annihilated in Skye with the Scots.

In the final blows of the game, the big scores of Randy's Reds in the early endgame proved their undoing. We were cruising along at warp speed in the game, looking to finish in just above three hours and the adrenalin and weariness were telling. The Brigantes were destroyed by the Dubliners as Matt looked at Randy's Reds as his chief opponent, and the Saxons were taken out to a man by the last of the Normans.

With the points counted, your GM won with a Green score of 234, Matt's Yellow were just a nose behind at 232, Randy's Reds had 204, and Woolly's Blues weren't far behind at 192. And all played in three and a quarter hours.

Thanks to everyone who played. It was another wonderful tournament and I'm looking forward to seeing everyone next year.

Now, what's up with Britannia? Lew still has the publishing rights, and is working through, with lots of enthusiastic commentary from the community, the next evolution of Britannia. It looks like there may be a couple of versions, one targeted for the more casual gamer, and one that looks to continue the Britannia tradition of a lengthier game. The discussions and play testing are still going on, so perhaps we'll see what happens next year.

(I (Lew Pulsipher) am going to comment. Green's score in Round 13 was so low that everyone agreed he was "dead". Jim did a great job of scoring in the endgame. Matt didn't do quite enough point counting in 16, relying on that Round 13 supposition, and when he attacked Red, he should have beaten on Green as well, as he easily could have. Quite deflating for Matt to lose by only two points in those circumstances, but I'm sure he won't make that mistake again.

Some players want to win by 30+ points every game, they don't want it to be close. Others, including Jim, like games to be close. Like this one.)