



Going Places

Matthew Lunn looks at the movers and shakers in the 4NCL's second tier contest

The 2014/15 season of the 4NCL concluded in typically exuberant fashion, a fitting farewell to the Hinckley Island and Daventry Court hotels which served as venues for many years. From November 2015, the top two divisions make their permanent home at the Holiday Inn at Birmingham Airport, whilst Division 3 South and the newly formed Division 4 will be housed at the Park Inn Telford. Here are the highlights from the final weekend in Division 2.

The Promotion Pool

One quirk of Division One is that no squad can field three teams. Division 2's Promotion Pool contained Guildford III and Barbican Youth, so every other team was still vying for promotion, as finishing sixth could be sufficient to claim a place as one of the eligible four.

On paper, the minnows of the group were Sussex Martlets, who were enjoying their debut season in Division 2. Their weakened weekend 4 team had claimed two vital victories, meaning that defeating Grantham Sharks II in Round 9 would guarantee promotion. In spite of being outrated by 44 Elo per board, the Martlets achieved a crushing 6-2 victory, thanks in part to a fine piece of calculation by Jude Lenier.



3Cs brought in French Olympiad star Christian Bauer to ensure they topped the division.

practical winning chances: 26...♙xd5 27 ♗xd5 ♖e3! and White must play 28 c4! to stay in the game (not 28 ♖xf7+ ♖h6 as the d5-bishop is toast: now 29 c4 is met by 29...♗xd5, and White cannot recapture because of the threat of mate on g2). After 28...♗xf1 29 ♖xf7+ ♖h6 30 ♗xf1 (if 30 ♖xf1 b5) 30...♗e3 Black may be able to claim a small advantage, but White should be able to hold the draw.

However, Black had missed the crushing:

27 ♖xf5! gxf5 28 ♖xf5 ♗g6

Now White has a forced mate, which Lenier faultlessly calculates, but 28...♗e3+ is insufficient too: after 29 ♗xe3 ♖xe3 30 ♗xe3 axb3 31 ♖xf7+ ♖g8 32 ♖f2 White is a safe three pawns up in the ending.

29 ♖xf7+ ♖h6 30 ♗d2+ ♖h5 31 g4+ ♖h4 32 ♗f2+ ♖g5 33 ♗f4+ ♖h4 34 g5+ ♖xh3 35 ♗h2+ ♖g4 36 ♖f4+ ♖xg5 37 ♗h4# 1-0

This was a truly remarkable achievement for a squad consisting of so many young, local players, many of whom have been playing together since their long tenure in Division 3.

Astonishingly, Sussex Martlets weren't the only team to achieve a second successive promotion this year. Although Spirit of Atticus's ascent to the 4NCL's top tier is less of an underdog story, given their squad's experience, their success should be celebrated for similar reasons. Judging from John Carleton's exemplary team reports, they are a very close knit unit, and have a core group of players who have been together since the

team's inception. Given their strength in depth, and the quality of their compulsory female player (WGM Sheila Jackson), I believe they have a very good chance of staying in Division 1 for many years to come.

The least surprising triumph of the pool was 3Cs. They began the weekend on 7 points, which, given Barbican Youth and Guildford III's ineligibility for promotion, all but guaranteed their Division 1 status for 2015/16. Perhaps buoyed by the prospect of winning their pool, they recruited 2624-rated French GM Christian Bauer for the final weekend. Bauer duly gave his team 3/3, although he met a worthy opponent in Spirit of Atticus's Brett Lund.

J.Lenier-N.Birtwistle Sussex Martlets vs Grantham Sharks II

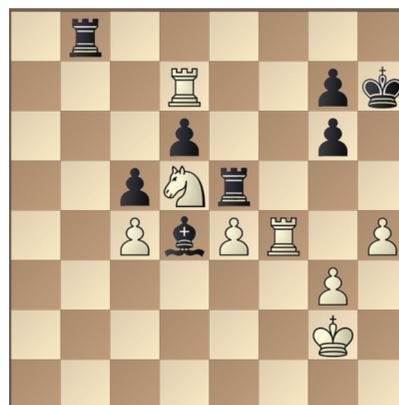


An intriguing position: what happens if Black plays 26...♙xd5 and 27...♗e3?

26...a4??

This move makes positional sense if White were forced to move his bishop, as Black gets a marginally better version of the aforementioned line, which gives him some

C.Bauer-D.B.Lund 3Cs vs Spirit of Atticus



Lund has defended very well, each move bringing him closer to a famous draw. Yet Bauer's last move, 58 ...d7, poses some problems, as Black has to be wary of ...xd6 and ...f6+ ideas in a number of lines. How should Black continue?

58...g5?

An admirably bold continuation, but it has a fatal flaw. Instead 58...e8, increasing the scope of Black's bishop, looks best – f6 and g7 are covered, and 59 ...xd6 can be met by 59...e5. Furthermore, the e8-rook can shift to an active position on the f-file if White tries to harass Black's g6-pawn with ...g4.

59 hxg5 ...xg5 60 ...h4+

Black presumably saw that 60 ...xd6? is impossible, as after 60...e5 White must give up the exchange. Notably 61 ...h4+ ...g8 wins Black material, since 62 ...a6 leads to mate after 62...xg3+ 63 ...f1 ...b1+ 64 ...f2 ...b2+ 65 ...f1 ...f3+, or 62 ...b6 ...xb6 63 ...xb6 ...xg3 and the threat of ...b6+ means White must give up the exchange with 64 ...h5, when the ending is lost.

60...g8

Once again, the d pawn is immune due to ...e5. However, Lund had missed...

61 ...e7+! 1-0

...which prompted immediate resignation. The b8-rook is lost after 61...f7 (or 61...f8 62 ...h8+) 62 ...c6+ ...e6 63 ...e7+ ...f6 64 ...f4+ ...g6 65 ...xb8.

Even if 3Cs don't retain Bauer's services next year, a squad containing Stephen Gordon, Adam Ashton, and a host of talented juniors will continue to be a force to reckon with.

After a weakened Barbican Youth – who struggled with defaults throughout the weekend – suffered a Round 11 rout at the hands of 3Cs, and Guildford III trounced Grantham Sharks II, the promotion berths were clarified. The team in fifth would get promoted, but not the team in sixth. This meant that only a victory for White Rose II against Cambridge University II would suffice, while the latter team only needed a draw. Ultimately the Yorkshire team's 3½/4 on the top boards proved decisive, and they progressed in fifth, separated from Guildford III only by game points.

The Relegation Pool

The Division 2 relegation pool was extremely closely fought. At the start of Round 11 Rhyfelwyr Essyllwg, MK Phoenix and Wessex were already relegated, and none of the

remaining five teams were safe. Indeed, such was the competition in the top half of the pool, it was possible for a team to be relegated with the unlikely score of 9, the equivalent of four wins, a draw and two losses. KJCA Kings were the only survival chaser playing an already relegated side (Wessex) and, in spite of their board five essaying 1 e4 e5 2 ...h5 against Roger de Coverly (a bizarre draw that is definitely worth a look), they guaranteed their safety with a smoothish 5-3 victory.

Brown Jack Witney and Kings Head would both survive if BCM Dragons failed to defeat Anglian Avengers 1 – assuming Brown Jack obtained at least half a game point – but the two former teams would be in jeopardy if Anglian Avengers lost. Consequently the match was a tense affair, epitomised by the following extraordinary game.

D.Hackett-D.Guthrie
Brown Jack vs Kings Head
Closed Sicilian

1 e4 c5 2 ...c3 ...c6 3 g3 g6 4 ...g2 ...g7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e5 7 ...h3 exf4 8 ...xf4 ...h6 9 ...fd5 ...g4

We have reached a novel position in the Closed Sicilian. White is perfectly fine after 10 ...d2 or 10 ...f3, but Hackett, true to his name, opts for a more aggressive idea:

10 ...xh6!? ...xc3+

A vital move. After 10...xd1? 11 ...xg7 White will emerge with material equality and a massive attack: for example, 11...b4 (11...g8 12 ...f6+ wins the queen, due to 12...e7 13 ...cd5+ ...e6 14 ...h3+ ...e5 15 ...d7#) 12 ...f6+ ...e7 13 ...cd5+ ...xd5 14 ...xd5+ ...d7 15 0-0.

11 bxc3 ...xd1 12 ...xd1



White doesn't have full compensation for the queen, but Black must play accurately to prove this. **12...e5 13 ...h3 ...f3+ 14 ...e2 ...g5 15 ...g4 f5 15...e6** is far more solid, controlling the important g7-square. **16 exf5 ...f7 17 ...g7 ...g5?**

A blunder, hurling the queen into the heart of a position from where it will struggle to emerge. **18 ...f6+ ...d8 19 h4 ...e8+ 20 ...f1 ...e3 21 ...xe8?**

Blundering back. Hackett missed that after 21 ...d5 ...xg3 22 ...g1 Guthrie must give up his queen, as 22...h2 isn't possible due to 23 fxf6, threatening both gxf7 and ...f6#.

21...xg3 22 ...f6 gxf5

22...e5 is preferable. After the natural 23 ...g1 (23 ...e2 ...f3 24 ...e4 ...h2+ 25 ...xh2 ...xh2 26 f6 is extremely interesting, but Black seems to be OK after 26...c7) 23...xf4+ 24 ...e2 gxf5 25 ...h5 ...h2+ White has nothing better than acquiescing to a repetition.

23 ...h3 ...f4+ 24 ...f3 ...h2 25 ...f2 ...xh4 26 ...xf5 ...g5 27 ...e1 ...e5 28 ...h8



The dust has settled: White has a rook and two bishops for a queen and a pawn; a significant material advantage, even if his pieces are oddly coordinated. Hackett plays the next phase of the game extremely well.

28...c7 29 ...d5+ ...c6 30 ...xe5 dxe5 31 ...xe5 ...h4 32 ...e6+! A knockout blow, as if 32...xd5 33 c4+ ...d4 34 ...e4+.

32...b5 33 ...c7+ ...a5 34 ...xa8 ...d8 35 ...e5 ...xa8 36 ...xc5+ ...b6

Alternatively, 36...b5 37 ...e4 ...b8 38 ...c6 with ...ff6 to follow, and Black must give up his queen to prevent mate. **37 ...c8 1-0** An extraordinary final position.

The match ended in a 4-4 draw which, coupled with BCM Dragons' defeat, left the final table as follows:

2014/5 - 4NCL Division 2 - Promotion Pool						
	Team	P	W	D	L	Pts GP
1	3Cs	7	6	1	0	13 37
2	Sussex Martlets	7	5	0	2	10 31
3	Spirit of Atticus A	7	4	1	2	9 31½
4	Guildford III	7	3	0	4	6 30
5	White Rose II	7	3	0	4	6 27½
6	Cambridge University II	7	2	1	4	5 24½
7	Barbican 4NCL Youth	7	2	1	4	5 21½
8	Grantham Sharks II	7	1	0	6	2 19½

2014/5 - 4NCL Division 2 - Relegation Pool						
	Team	P	W	D	L	Pts GP
1	Anglian Avengers	7	5	1	1	11 34½
2	KJCA Kings	7	5	0	2	10 32
3	Kings Head	7	4	1	2	9 32½
4	Brown Jack Witney	7	4	1	2	9 31
5	BCM Dragons	7	3	1	3	7 24
6	Rhyfelwyr Essyllwg	7	2	1	4	5 26½
7	MK Phoenix	7	1	1	5	3 22
8	Wessex	7	0	2	5	2 19½