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Tournament Reports: Baden-Baden, Zurich, Reykjavik and Bunnratty



Interviews with GM Arkadij Naiditsch and GM Sabino Brunello



Boring, Boring Wood Green: 4NCL champions fail to impress

Chess

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Boring, Boring Wood Green

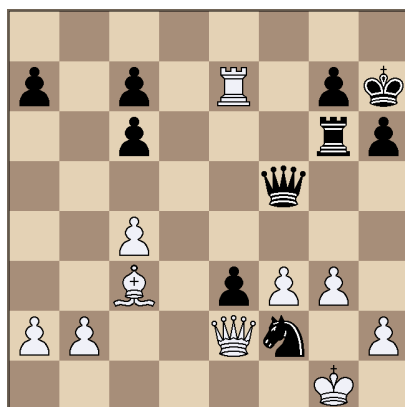
Simon Ansell is unimpressed by the 4NCL Champions in Daventry

The third weekend of the 4NCL is when the season takes shape: by the end of round 6 most teams will know if they'll be playing in the Championship or relegation pools for the final matches of the season. The latest action took place at Staverton Park on the edge of Daventry on the weekend of 23-24 February.

I offer no apologies for not showing any games from Pool A's 'big match' of the weekend between Wood Green and Cheddleton on the Sunday. The outcome was incredibly disappointing – it wasn't that all the games finished drawn (the second time this season Wood Green have been involved in an eight-board stalemate, after their previously reported round 2 encounter against e2e4), but that seven of the boards were finished in 25 moves or less. Only Wood Green's Jonathan Rowson and Cheddleton's Denis Rombaldoni emerged with any credit, playing for 85 moves down to bare kings before splitting the point. Rowson pressed for most of the game and was close to converting a rook endgame with an extra pawn, but he is entitled to expect more support from his team-mates if Wood Green are to retain their title. I'll leave it for the reader to decide if professional chess players, being paid to play, should be expected to do more for their money than turn up and make quick draws.

This result gave the solid and consistent Barbican team a chance to make up ground on both their rivals, and they took full advantage to move joint top of the table with Wood Green after two wins against Sambuca Sharks and e2e4. Sam Collins, playing for Barbican for the first time this season, and Ingrid Lauterbach were their star performers, both scoring two wins. On the Saturday Sam capitalised on a blunder by the Sharks' fast-improving Peter Roberson.

P. Roberson-S. Collins Sharks vs. Barbican



Black has some vague play against the white king, but the positional trumps are with White: the black queenside structure is shot, the e3-pawn is about to drop and g7 is under serious pressure. Fortunately the kingside play is enough for a draw.

32...d3

The only other option, 32...b1+, leads nowhere after 33 e1 d3 34 xe3 dxe1 35 xe1 xb2 36 e4! when the pin on the g6-rook should eventually decide.

33 f1??

Having all the trumps listed above, Roberson plays for the win... but falls into a vicious trap. 33 h1 d2+ 34 g1 with a repetition is how the game should have finished.

33...d4!

Suddenly White is completely lost.

34 xe3

Otherwise, 34 gxf4 h3+ 35 e1 g1+ mates and 34 g4 b1+ 35 e1 d3+ 36 g1 c2 also decides.

34...h3+ 35 f2

35 e1 d2+ wins the white queen.

35...xh2+ 36 f1 h3+ 37 f2 xg3+ 38 f1 h3+ 39 e1 g2+ 0-1

The Barbican-e2e4 match was somewhat close, though. e2e4 won on boards three and six – Peter Sowray outplayed Max Devereaux while Mark Josse scored an upset over Lorin D'Costa. For Barbican, in addition to Collins and Lauterbach, Ryan Rhys Griffiths was the player who made the difference, successfully navigating the complications in the following encounter with Daniel Fernandez.

R. Griffiths-D. Fernandez Barbican vs. e2e4 Modern Defence

1 d4 g6 2 e4 g7 3 c3 a6

This game caught my eye because I used the same system as Black against John Emms in my Sunday game. Your computer will tell you White is better for most of the game if you play almost any sensible developing moves, but in my opinion the ...a6 Modern (or in this exact position, the Accel-

DIVISION 1a	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Barbican 4NCL 1		3-5	5-3	4½-3½	4½-3½	6-2		7½-½	30½	10
2 Wood Green Hilsmark 1	5-3		4-4	5-3	4-4		5½-2½	7-1	30½	10
3 Cheddleton 1	3-5	4-4		5½-2½	6½-1½	5-3	7-1		31	9
4 Cambridge University 1	3½-4½	3-5	2½-5½			5-3	4-4	5-3	23	5
5 e2e4.org.uk 1	3½-4½	4-4	1½-6½			2½-5½	5-3	6-2	22½	5
6 Sambuca Sharks	2-6		3-5	3-5	5½-2½		2-6	5-3	20½	4
7 Guildford 2		2½-5½	1-7	4-4	3-5	6-2		4-4	20½	4
8 BCM Dragons	½-7½	1-7		3-5	2-6	3-5	4-4		13½	1

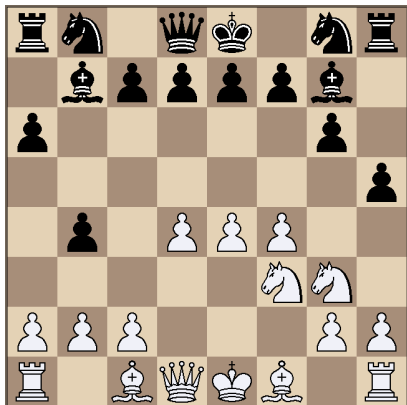
DIVISION 1b	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Guildford 1		7-1	6-2	6½-1½	4-4		7-1	6½-1½	37	11
2 White Rose 1	1-7		7-1	2½-5½	4½-3½	5½-2½		5-3	25½	8
3 Jutes of Kent	2-6	1-7		5-3	5½-2½	5½-2½	5-3		24	8
4 Barbican 4NCL 2	1½-6½	5½-2½	3-5			5½-2½	4½-3½	4-4	24	7
5 Wood Green Hilsmark	4-4	3½-4½	2½-5½			3½-4½	7-1	5-3	25½	5
6 South Wales Dragons		2½-5½	2½-5½	2½-5½	4½-3½		4-4	5-3	21	5
7 Warwickshire Select 1	1-7		3-5	3½-4½	1-7	4-4		4½-3½	17	3
8 Blackthorne Russia	1½-6½	3-5		4-4	3-5	3-5	3½-4½		18	1

erated ...a6 Modern where Black omits ...d6) is not such a bad opening and is a good way of mixing things up when playing for a win with the black pieces.

4 f4

Ryan Rhys Griffiths chooses the most aggressive and, in my opinion, the best response.

4...b5 5 ♖f3 b4 6 ♗e2 ♠b7 7 ♘g3 h5!



The typical way of meeting the knight transfer to g3, and easily the best move – Black must not be passive in this system. I used a similar idea against Emms.

8 ♠d3 h4 9 ♗f1!

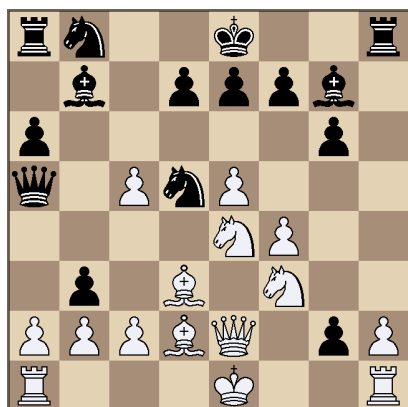
The best square for the knight in this exact position, for no other reason than that it keeps the e2-square free for the white

queen to support the e4-pawn. 9 ♗e2 h3! followed by 10...♗f6 or perhaps even 10...f5!? is exactly what Black is looking for, namely a mess! Ryan keeps control excellently throughout the whole game.

9...♗f6 10 ♗e2 h3 11 ♘g3 c5?

This is consistent with Black's aggressive strategy, but is premature here. 11...e6 preparing ...♗c6 was better. There are so many options for both sides that giving a full analysis is pointless, but a sample line might start 12 ♠d2 ♗c6 13 0-0-0 ♗e7 14 ♗he1 a5, again with a mess – it's not clear to me which pawn break White should play for in the centre, or even where the black king should go.

12 dxc5 ♗a5 13 e5 ♗d5 14 ♗e4 b3+ 15 ♠d2 hxg2



16 ♗g1!

16 ♗xg2 ♗xf4! is one to avoid and good for Black as the white centre collapses.

16...♗b4 17 a3 ♗xd3+ 18 cxd3 ♗c7 19 ♗d6+!

This small tactic allows White to exchange the b7-bishop, Black's only active piece.

19...♗f8 20 ♗xb7 ♗xb7 21 ♗xg2 ♗d5 22 ♗c1 ♗c6 23 ♗c4 ♗h3 24 ♗f2 f6?!

Black has completed development, but hasn't achieved the active play he desired. Fernandez continues to try and mix things up.

25 ♗e4

25 ♗xg6! fxe5 26 ♠c3! was very strong, when 26...♗d4 27 ♠xd4 exd4 28 ♗e4! ♗xe4 29 dxe4 d3 30 e5! keeps the black bishop shut out of the game. The d3-pawn will drop and White should win the endgame. The move played is by no means bad, though, and doesn't allow Black the luxury of activating his bishop for even one move.

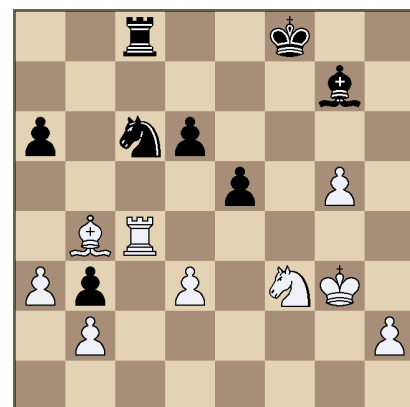
25...♗xe4 26 ♗xe4 g5

Consistent.

27 fxg5 fxe5 28 ♗g3!

Simple and effective play, again exchanging another active black piece. With these rooks off the board, the h-pawn's presence begins to be felt.

28...♗xg3 29 ♗xg3 d5 30 cxd6 exd6 31 ♗c4 ♗c8 32 ♠b4



32...e4

A final try to activate his pieces. Instead after 32...♗e7 33 ♠c3 d5 34 ♗a4 finally White will begin the procession of the h-pawn.

33 ♠xd6+ ♗f7 34 dxe4 ♗xb2 35 ♗d2!

The b3-pawn falls and the game is over.

35...♗e6 36 ♠f4 ♗xa3 37 ♗xb3 ♠d6 38 ♗xc6! 1-0

A small tactic to finish. I was impressed with how effortlessly Ryan Rhys Griffiths kept full control in this game, never allowing his opponent even a sniff of activity, despite his best efforts to the contrary.

So Barbican, Cheddleton and Wood Green will qualify for the Championship Pool and will almost certainly be joined by either Cambridge or e24e4, who meet in round 7



Peter Roberson will soon be an IM but was too ambitious against Sam Collins.

with e2e4 requiring a win. Cambridge were held by Guildford 2 on the Sunday, but Eddie Dearing scored a nice win for them with a good old-fashioned king hunt.

E.Dearing-V.Platt Cambridge vs. Guildford 2 *Chigorin Defence*

1 d4 d5 2 c4 ♟c6 3 ♟f3 ♟g4 4 ♟c3 ♟xf3

I won't pretend to be an expert on this system, but my database gives 4...e6 as the most common move here.

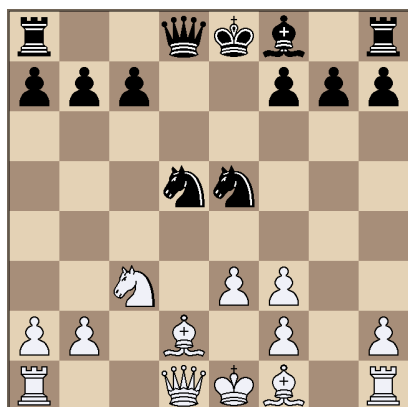
5 gxf3!?

5 exf3 has been played the few times this position has previously been reached, but both recaptures have something going for them and it's more a matter of taste than about the objective merits of both possibilities.

5...♟f6 6 e3 e6 7 ♟d2 e5?

It seems strange to play ...e7-e6 immediately followed by ...e6-e5, but I assume Black was trying to show that White's last interferes with his queen's support of the centre. The black position is not ready for such drastic action, though, and the simple 7...♟d7 would have been normal.

8 dxe5 ♟xe5 9 cxd5 ♟xd5



10 ♟a4+!

Perhaps Platt missed this very strong idea.

10...♟c6?

10...c6 was necessary when 11 ♟e4 ♟d6 12 ♟xd5 cxd5 13 ♟xd5 wins a pawn and is thus much better for White, but at least Black will get castled and the game will continue.

11 ♟e4+

A good move, forcing Black to retreat further, but here White had the surprising 11 ♟a6!, virtually winning on the spot.

11...♟ce7 12 ♟c4! ♟b6

12...c6 was impossible, due to 13 ♟xd5 cxd5 14 ♟b5+ winning the black queen.

13 ♟xb7! c6

13...♟xc4 14 ♟b5+ regains the piece when White will be simply a pawn up with a good position.

14 ♟b3 a5

What else?

15 ♟a4!

Another fine move.

15...♟b8 16 ♟a6 ♟xa4 17 ♟xa4 ♟b6 18 ♟xa5 ♟d5 19 0-0-0 ♟f6 20 ♟c3 ♟xc3

Now we see the start of the king hunt.

21 ♟a8+ ♟e7 22 ♟d8+ ♟e6 23 ♟d7+ ♟e5 24 f4+ ♟e4 25 ♟d4+ ♟f3 26 ♟h3+ 1-0

If the Cambridge-e2e4 match is drawn, there is a mathematical chance that Sambuca Sharks or Guildford 2 could overtake them, but as they will require a minimum 7-1 victory over Barbican and Wood Green respectively, it really is the most improbable of scenarios.

Congratulations to Sharks captain Ben Purton, who chalked up one hundred 4NCL games – all for the same team – and celebrated with a win on the Sunday. Your reporter has lost count of his appearances, but must be now approaching the 200-mark, which shows both my age and also the success of the 4NCL, now firmly established as one of Europe's top chess leagues.

Guildford are probably the only team from Pool B capable of challenging the top three Pool A sides for the title, and I would now perhaps make them favourites for the title given Wood Green's poor form. The talented young Dutch Grandmaster Robin van Kampen was convincing in the 6½-1½ demolition of my team, Blackthorne Russia.

R.Van Kampen-A.Ledger Guildford vs. Blackthorne *Caro-Kann Defence*

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♟f5 4 ♟f3 e6 5 ♟e6 ♟d7 6 0-0 ♟e7 7 c3 h6 8 ♟bd2 ♟h7 9 ♟b3 ♟g6 10 ♟e3 ♟e7 11 ♟d3 0-0



12 ♟b1!

A novelty. 12 ♟c2 has been played before. At first I wasn't entirely sure of the advantages of the text – only that perhaps the c-file opens after ...c6-c5 from Black – but there is another subtle point revealed

later in the game.

12...♟c7 13 ♟c1

The knight begins a long journey to the kingside, where it can participate in a king-side attack.

13...c5 14 ♟e2 ♟fc8

Vacating f8 for a knight.

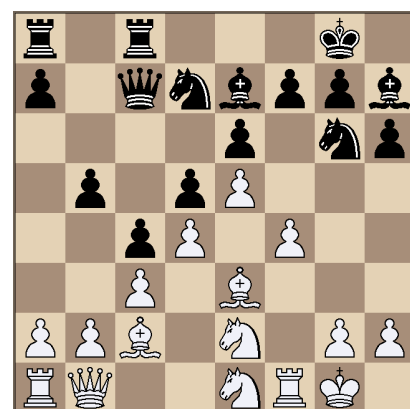
15 ♟e1

Now f4-f5 is White's obvious plan.

15...b5?!

Andy Ledger tries to begin queenside counterplay, but it never gets anywhere. With the benefit of hindsight, I think Black should rush to exchange the light-squared bishops here with 15...♟gf8, after which he may even consider ...f7-f5 as a response to any f2-f4 advance by White.

16 f4 c4 17 ♟c2



The second advantage of putting the queen on b1, rather than c2, reveals itself.

17...♟b6 18 g4?!

Very aggressive, but the immediate 18 f5 was simple and strong: 18...exf5 19 ♟xf5 ♟g8 20 ♟xh7+ ♟xh7 21 ♟f5 ♟e6 is just about forced and now 22 ♟f3! gives White a sizeable advantage, as ♟f4, removing the blockading queen and hitting the weak d5-pawn, is imminent and will be very strong.

18...♟gf8 19 ♟g2 f6

Obviously Black should not sit passively and wait to be checkmated on the kingside, but the text is double-edged: the g2-knight is temporarily prevented from moving to join the attack due to the tactic ...fxe5; dxe5 ♟xe5 (the e3-bishop will be undefended), but Black does weaken his kingside light squares.

20 ♟g3 b4 21 ♟h5 ♟xc2 22 ♟xc2 g6 23 exf6 ♟xf6 24 ♟g3 bxc3 25 bxc3 ♟ab8 26 ♟f2

Black has played fairly natural moves, but now it seems that f4-f5 is coming with great strength regardless of how he tries to organise his defence. It seems that the whole plan of queenside play, beginning with 15...b5, is simply too slow.

26...♟d8 27 f5! exf5 28 ♟xh6 fxg4 29 ♟af1

The pressure mounts, and there is no defence to the increasing threats.

29...♟g7 30 ♟xg7 ♟xg7 31 ♟d2 ♟e7



Strong play from Dutch GM Robin van Kampen.

32 ♖e3 ♜e6 33 ♜xg4! ♜c6 34 ♜g5 ♜cb6 35 ♜f5+ ♜f7 36 ♜gh6+ ♜e8 37 ♜g7# 1-0

Impressively simple and very strong play from Robin van Kampen.

White Rose and Jutes of Kent will join Guildford in the Championship Pool, whilst the remaining place will be decided between the second teams of Barbican and Wood Green who, similarly to Cambridge and e2e4.org.uk, meet in round seven with Wood Green 2 requiring the victory.

White Rose's Simon Buckley defeated Jovanka Houska in their excellent victory against a strong Wood Green 2 side.

J.Houska-S.Buckley

Wood Green 2 vs. White Rose
Bogo-Indian Defence

1 d4 e6 2 c4 ♜f6 3 ♜f3 ♜b4+ 4 ♜d2 a5 5 g3 d5 6 ♜g2 0-0 7 ♜c2 ♜bd7 8 0-0 ♜e7 9 ♜f4

9 cxd5 exd5 10 ♜xc7 doesn't win a pawn, as e2 is en prise, but may have been a good option anyway, as White will be slightly better in the resulting structure after, say, 10...♜xe2 11 ♜e1 ♜a6 12 ♜xb4 axb4 13 ♜bd2.

9...♜d6 10 ♜bd2

Allowing Black to exchange on f4 is double-edged, but Jovanka understands these structures well, as I know to my cost having lost on the white side of a similar

position to her a couple of years ago when experimenting with the Catalan.

10...♜xf4 11 gxf4 c6?!

The c8-bishop was probably none too happy about this move and would have preferred 11...b6, so as to become active on b7 or a6.

12 ♜e5 ♜e8

A good move, preparing ...f6 to kick the strong white knight and its black colleague will be well placed on d6.

13 e3 ♜d6 14 ♜h1 ♜h8 15 ♜g1 f6 16 ♜d3 e5!

This strong central break seems to solve all Black's problems, and more. Perhaps White rushed into ♜h1 and ♜g1 without taking necessary precautions. My computer has been suggesting

c4-c5 for several moves – not a typical computer move, but I think, after long consideration, that the point is that White should put her knights on f3 and d3 to hinder ...e5, and must first kick the d6-knight away so it is not able to jump into e4.

17 dxe5 fxe5 18 cxd5 e4! 19 ♜e5 cxd5 20 ♜xd7

The knight is unable to stay on e5 and Black emerges with complete development, all his pieces on good squares and kingside attacking chances.

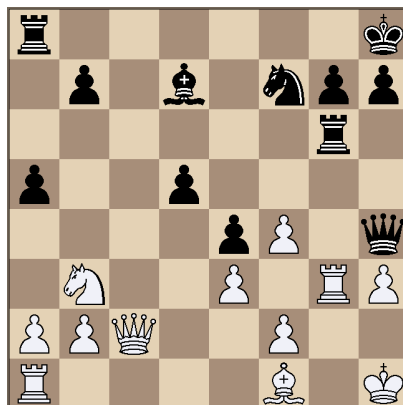
20...♜xd7 21 ♜b3 ♜f6!

The crude direct attack turns out to be very strong.

22 ♜f1 ♜h6 23 ♜g5

Unfortunately this artificial move is necessary to force Black to displace his knight and therefore slow the attack before the inevitable ...♜h4.

23...♜f7 24 ♜g3 ♜h4 25 h3 ♜g6!



26 ♜c7?

The losing move, but it was tough to defend this position in any case. White had to hit the d5-pawn with the incredibly hard-to-find 26 ♜d2! (if 26 ♜h2 ♜h6 27 ♜d2 ♜aa6!?), when after 26...♜xg3 (Black can play 26...a4 27 ♜c5 ♜c6 and claim to still be better, but immediate disaster has been averted) 27 fxg3 ♜xg3 28 ♜xd5 ♜xh3 29 ♜xf7 Black amazingly seems to have no more than a draw.

26...♜xh3! 27 ♜xg6 ♜xf1+ 28 ♜g1 hxg6 29 ♜xf7

29 ♜xf1 ♜h6 and 29 ♜xf1 a4 don't help.

29...♜e2! 30 ♜d4 ♜g4+ 31 ♜h2 ♜f3 0-1

Mate is inevitable.

Jutes of Kent were in good form too, and I thank them for always producing several publishable games which makes my report-writing easier. First, Bragi Thorfinnsson outplayed James Cobb in their 5½-2½ Saturday victory over South Wales Dragons.

J.Cobb-Br.Thorfinnsson

Dragons vs. Jutes
Grünfeld Defence

1 ♜f3 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 ♜g7 4 ♜g2 0-0 5 0-0 d5 6 cxd5 ♜xd5 7 d4 ♜b6 8 ♜c3 ♜c6 9 e3 ♜e8 10 ♜e1 a5 11 ♜e2 ♜e6

This fashionable variation is recommended in Boris Avrukh's encyclopaedic *Grandmaster Repertoire* volumes on the Grünfeld, but White's next seems to be new and not the best try for an advantage.

12 b3?!

12 ♜d2 and 12 ♜d1 are the two theoretical moves.

12...a4 13 ♜xa4 ♜xa4 14 bxa4 ♜xa4 15 ♜b2 ♜a8 16 a3 ♜a5 17 ♜g5 ♜c4 18 ♜c2 ♜b3 19 ♜ab1 ♜a6 20 ♜e4 b5

Black's light-square strategy has seen him create some pressure on the queenside. White should still be quite okay, though, as the central pawn structure is very solid and all his pieces are on good squares.

21 ♜c1?!

I don't really understand this move – there was no need to give up a potentially strong bishop for the knight, which looks nice on b3 but isn't actually doing too much. Perhaps James Cobb was concerned about the typical Grünfeld break ...c5, but Black can't really afford to give up a pawn on the c5-square as the resulting passed c-pawn will be too strong. My computer's first choice is 21 ♜ed1, whereas I would likely automatically play 21 h4.

21...♜xc1 22 ♜c5 ♜a5 23 ♜exc1

It's also possible that Cobb simply forgot that his rook was en prise on e1, so 23 ♜xa4 is not playable.

23...♜xa3

So Black wins a pawn, but it's not the end of the world by any means.

24 ♖b7?

This is too much though – there was no reason to move the knight from the excellent outpost. White should have continued as if nothing had happened with 24 ♖e4 followed by ♖c6 next, when his better structure and good pieces should offer enough compensation for the pawn.

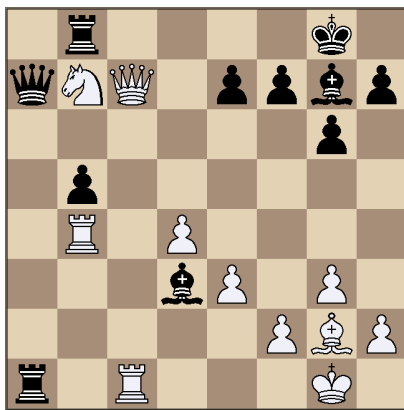
24...♗a7 25 ♖e4

25 ♖c5 e5! activates Black's pieces.

25...♙d3

The knight on c5 was defending this square. Suddenly White is forced to completely uncoordinate his pieces and punishment is surprisingly swift.

26 ♖c6 ♗b8 27 ♗b4 ♖a1 28 ♖xc7



28...♗b7! 29 ♙xb7 ♖xc1+ 30 ♖xb7 31 ♖c5 ♗f3 0-1

Like in the previous game, White perishes on the light squares. There's a reason the Catalan bishop is so highly rated.

Next, Alexis Harakis won a crazy game against the promising junior Isaac Sanders as they defeated Barbican 2 on the Sunday.

A. Harakis-I. Sanders

Jutes vs. Barbican 2
Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖f3 ♗f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♗c3 ♗bd7 6 ♖c2 ♙d6 7 ♙d2 0-0 8 g4!?

This idea is more usually played on the previous move, before Black has castled and hence the g7-pawn is undefended, but I believe has been largely neutralised. Alexis doesn't worry about such theoretical technicalities and as a result creates some great entertainment for us.

8...♙xg4 9 ♙d3 f5 10 ♙e2?!

This is surely taking it too far though. I would play 10 h3 ♗g6 11 0-0-0 and start attempting to prove some compensation on the g-file.

10...a6?

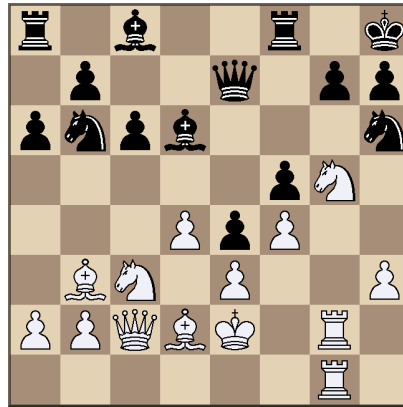
Obviously this is a desirable move if it can be had for free, but already it's time to think about immediately refuting White's play.

10...e5! was logical and strong: 11 ♙xf5 ♗xf5 12 ♗xf5 ♗f8 13 ♖c2 (13 ♗g5 ♙e7 14 ♗h5 g6 15 ♗h3 ♗xe3 wins) 13...e4 14 ♗e5 (14 ♗g1 ♗h4 15 ♗f1 ♗xh2 gives a huge attack that White is unlikely to survive) 14...♗xe5 15 dxe5 ♙g4+ 16 ♙e1 ♗xe5 with more than enough compensation for the exchange on the light squares and against the stranded white king.

11 ♖ag1 ♙h8 12 ♖g2 dxc4 13 ♙xc4 e5

14 h3 ♗h6 15 ♖hg1 e4 16 ♗g5 ♗b6

17 ♙b3 ♖e7 18 f4!



18...♙d7

If 18...exf3+ 19 ♗xf3 g6 White might actually not be doing too badly. The potential threat of the dark-squared bishop arriving on the long diagonal at some point could be a serious one. I would have preferred this over the text, though, if only because White shouldn't be allowed to simply block the centre like this having put his king on e2.

19 ♗gxe4!

In for a penny... This is nice idea, creating an unusual material balance and investing a small amount of material to open up the black king.

19...fxe4 20 ♖xg7 ♖xg7 21 ♖xg7 ♙xg7 22 ♖xe4 ♗f5

22...♙xh3! is my computer's first choice, not so much to grab a pawn (although the passed h-pawn is potentially very useful), but more to make possible ...♙g4+, blocking the g-file and further displacing the white king.

23 ♖g2+ ♙h8 24 ♗e4 ♖ae8?

I've mentioned a few times in my reports that I don't like giving up bishops for knights with no reason to do so, and here the punishment is brutal and very pretty. 24...♙e7 was somewhat more prudent.

25 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 26 d5!

Black is going to miss that bishop.

26...♗e4?

The other way of controlling the c3-square, 26...♗b5!, was already the only move. White should play 27 ♙d1!, preparing 28 a4 (the immediate 27 a4 can be answered by 27...♗d4+! 28 ♙d1 ♖g8 and the b3-bishop will fall when the queen moves – there is no longer mate on the long diagonal), when the more or less forced variation (that I won't pretend to have cal-

culated myself, or am even capable of calculating at my best) 27...♖g8 28 ♖f2 ♗xd5 29 ♙xd5 cxd5 30 a4 ♗d6 31 ♙c3+ ♖g7 32 ♙xg7+ ♙xg7 33 ♖g2+ ♙f8 34 ♖xd5 ♙xa4+ 35 b3 ♗d8 36 ♖e6 ♙c6 results in an unusual endgame that is easier to play for Black, but my guess is that it should be a draw.

27 dxc6!

I suspect that by now Isaac Sanders realised what was coming.

27...♙xc6 28 ♖xe4!

Crowning White's strategy.

28...♙g7 29 ♖d4+ ♙h6 30 ♖xb6

The knight falls too and it's all over.

30...♙f6 31 ♖c5 ♖g6 32 ♙f7 ♖g2+ 33 ♙f1 ♗d8 34 ♖h5+ ♙g7 35 ♙c3+ ♙f8 36 ♖h6+ ♙xf7 37 ♖f6+ ♙e8 38 ♖e6+ ♙f8 39 ♙b4+ ♙g7 40 ♖e7+ 1-0

From a personal point of view, the less said about the rest of Pool B the better, as Blackthorne Russia remain rooted to the bottom. It's hard to believe a team of experienced IMs and FMs has failed to win a single match this season, but with several players completely out of form and the competitiveness of the 4NCL increasing, the reality of the situation is that we are now probably odds-on for relegation, likely having to win our final four matches to have any chance at all of avoiding the drop. On paper that is by no means impossible, but on current form seems beyond us. Perhaps "experienced" should be replaced by "aging" in the above sentence!

We did run Wood Green 2 fairly close on the Sunday, but wins with black on boards one and three for Harriet Hunt, over Richard Pert, and myself, somewhat fortunately over John Emms in a ridiculous time-scramble, were to no avail as the middle order capitulated. We will be joined by Warwickshire Select and South Wales Dragons in the Relegation Pool – the latter will start from a strong position, carrying at least five points forward.

Rounds 7 and 8 take place at Hinckley Island on the weekend of 23-24 March, the venue where it was announced during weekend three that all 2013-14 Divisions One and Two matches will take place – the first time in a decade the 4NCL will be played at the same venue for the whole season. Personally I am indifferent to this change, as I find it hard to distinguish between one soulless-conference-hotel-with-attached-golf-course-in-the-middle-of-nowhere and the next, but I imagine some people have a preference based on travelling arrangements. In any case, it has to be said that the facilities at all the different 4NCL venues are good, playing conditions are excellent and in general the Barcelo and De Vere hotels do an excellent job at coping with the influx and demands of a huge group of not always easy-to-please chess players. See you at Hinckley!