

# Top Four Pull Away in the 4NCL

The storms abated as the 4NCL bandwagon pulled back into Hinckley Island in mid-February, although the two favourites, Guildford and Wood Green, were expected to face something of a powerful test in the shape of Cheddleton and Guildford II respectively.

## Pool A

Before the clash of the table-toppers, Cheddleton had to face Blackthorne Russia and Guildford, King's Head. One wonders how many in the Cheddleton ranks have visited their Staffordshire hometown, but such has long been the way with professional teams. As it was, they cruised home 6-2 against Blackthorne, winning the bottom four boards, with only two of their side likely to be disappointed: England's latest IM, David Eggleston, let slip a huge early advantage against Chris Duncan's favourite Dragon, while the Serbian GM Aleksandar Colovic wasn't the first to regret clinging on to an extra pawn in the Catalan; IM Richard Bates took full advantage to win a smooth game, which was almost meister gegen amateur-like, except that a grandmaster was black. Of the Cheddleton winners, Keith Arkell skilfully combined rook and knight in an endgame, but an endgame was not what Simon Williams reached.

## S.Williams-D.Ledger Cheddleton vs. Blackthorne Russia *Bird's Opening*

### 1 f4 d5 2 e3!?

Williams has dabbled in Bird's Opening throughout his career, so we should take seriously this attempt to avoid 2 ♘f3 ♗g4, as advocated in a certain *Beating Unusual Chess Openings*.

### 2...♗c6 3 ♗b5 ♗d6 4 ♗f3 ♗g4

This all feels very natural from both sides by analogy with the 2 ♗c3 Dutch.

### 5 b3

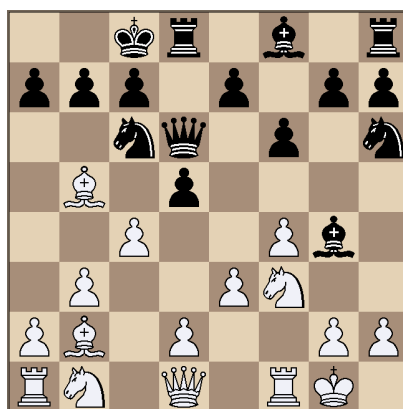
Another recent game saw 5 0-0 a6 6 ♗xc6+ ♗xc6 7 b3 e6 8 ♗b2 f6! 9 d4?! (9 ♗c3 ♗d6 10 ♗e1!? would both unpin and support the e3-e4 break) 9...♗d6 10 ♗bd2 ♗d7 by when Black was slightly for choice in Ilhomzoda-Kotsur, Dushanbe 2013, if

only because of the relationship between those key Dutch squares, e4 and e5.

### 5...♗h6!? 6 ♗b2 f6 7 0-0

Play has long left the theoretical high- and even by-ways, but Black's play may be just a little too creative. Williams is quick to mount a central challenge and 7 h3!? also looks a little better for White, since 7...♗h5 8 g4! leaves Black's kingside pieces tripping over each other and his position a little jammed-up following 8...♗f7 9 ♗a3 ♗d7 10 ♗c3 0-0-0 11 ♗e2.

### 7...0-0-0 8 c4!



### 8...♗f5

As can be seen, Dave Ledger can be a pretty creative player, but so too, of course, is Simon Williams, a man who must have enjoyed the early imbalance. Ledger hopes

to trouble White with ...♗h4, but perhaps he would have done better with the simple 8...a6: for instance, 9 ♗a3 (9 ♗a4 dxc4! 10 bxc4 ♗a5 leaves White a little weak on c4 and d3) 9...♗d7 10 cxd5 axb5 11 dxc6 ♗xc6 12 ♗c3 ♗b8 13 ♗c1 ♗a6. Black should be OK here with ...e5 on its way, but then again one might prefer not to voluntarily weaken one's king's pawn shield when up against the Ginger GM.

### 9 ♗c3 dxc4 10 bxc4!

10 ♗xc4 would have saved the d-pawn (10...♗xf3 11 ♗xf3 ♗xd2? 12 ♗e6+ wins the knight), but allowed Black some chances with 10...♗h4 followed by ...e6. Instead, Williams fights for the initiative in typical fashion.

### 10...♗xf3?!

Taking up the challenge, but this entails grabbing a rather hot pawn. However, it seems that things have already gone wrong for Black, with 10...♗h4 11 d4 leaving White looking quite strong in the centre and on the queenside. Moreover, 11...a6 12 ♗e4 ♗e6 13 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 14 ♗e5! ♗xd1 15 ♗xc6 ♗c2 16 ♗xd8 ♗xe4 17 ♗e6 would be a tactical line for Black to avoid.

Likewise, 10...♗h5 11 ♗a4 e6 12 ♗ab1 would have left only one side attacking.

### 11 ♗xf3 ♗xd2 12 ♗xc6 bxc6 13 ♗xc6 ♗d6?

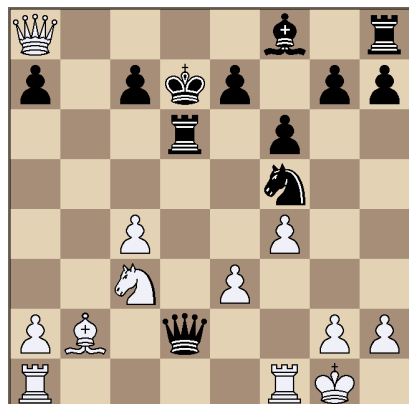
This just loses, although I dare say by this point Ledger was rather regretting not choosing a quieter customer for his early

DIV 1A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Guildford 1	**	6½-1½	5½-2½	6-2	6-2	6½-1½		7½-½	38	12
2 Cheddleton 1	1½-6½	**		6-2	5-3	6-2	7-1	6½-1½	32	10
3 Grantham Sharks 1	2½-5½		**	4½-3½	3½-4½	5-3	5½-2½	6-2	27	8
4 Barbican 4NCL 2	2-6	2-6	3½-4½	**	5-3	5½-2½	6-2		24	6
5 Wood Green HK 2	2-6	3-5	4½-3½	3-5	**		3½-4½	6-2	22	4
6 Blackthorne Russia	1½-6½	2-6	3-5	2½-5½		**	5½-2½	4½-3½	19	4
7 Oxford 1		1-7	2½-5½	2-6	4½-3½	2½-5½	**	6-2	18½	4
8 Kings Head 1	½-7½	1½-6½	2-6		2-6	3½-4½	2-6	**	11½	0

DIV 1B	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Wood Green HK 1	**	5½-2½	8-0	6-2	5½-2½	6-2	6½-1½		37½	12
2 Guildford 2	2½-5½	**	4-4		4½-3½	6-2	7-0	6½-1½	30½	9
3 e2e4.org.uk 1	0-8	4-4	**	2½-5½	5½-2½	5-3	6-2	5½-2½	21½	7
4 White Rose 1	2-6		5½-2½	**	3½-4½	3½-4½	5-3	6½-1½	26	6
5 3Cs 1	2½-5½	3½-4½	2½-5½	4½-3½	**		6-2	6½-1½	25½	6
6 Barbican 4NCL 1	2-6	2-6	3-5	4½-3½		**	6-2	5½-2½	23	6
7 Cambridge University 1	1½-6½	0-7		3-5	2-6	2-6	**	5½-2½	14	2
8 Grantham Sharks 2		1½-6½	3½-4½	1½-6½	1½-6½	2½-5½	2½-5½	**	13	0

experimentalism. He had to find 13...♖xe3+ 14 ♔h1 ♜b6, although 15 ♜a8+ ♔d7 16 ♜d5+ ♔d6 17 ♔a4 ♜b4 18 ♔c5+ ♔e8 19 ♔e6 does, quite frankly, look pretty disgusting for Black.

**14 ♜a8+ ♔d7**



**15 ♔e4**

Not the most common fork of queen and rook, but hardly a bad one at that.

**15...♖xe3+ 16 ♔h1 ♜b6 17 ♔a3**

It's fast turning into a massacre.



*Dave Ledger, perhaps rueing his creative approach against Simon Williams.*

**17...♖c6 18 ♖ad1+ ♔d6 19 c5 ♜a5 20 cxd6 1-0**

Guildford's victory was even more impressive as they racked up 7½ points against King's Head. Last month we saw how just strong the French Grandmaster Romain Edouard is, but another very talented player is the Australian IM and leading London chess coach, John-Paul Wallace. When the two met on top board, a real humdinger of a game ensued.

### R.Edouard-J.P.Wallace

Guildford vs. King's Head  
*King's Indian Defence*

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♔c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♙e3 ♔c6 7 ♔ge2 a6 8 ♜d2 ♜b8 9 ♔d1**

Suffering from a sense of déjà vu? Yes, it was only last month that we saw Edouard score a powerful victory with 9 ♜c1 (see pp.26-27 of the March *CHESS*). Presumably he deviated to avoid preparation, but the rook looks better on c1, thereby keeping d1

free for a key ♔d1-f2 regrouping.

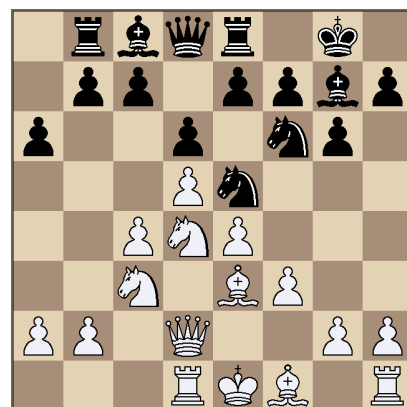
**9...♙e8!?**

Black again decides to wait. Instead, 9...b5 10 cxb5 axb5 11 d5 ♔e5 12 ♔d4 is complicated, but possibly slightly in White's favour.

**10 d5**

Rather ambitious, but 10 ♔c1 e5 also seems fine for Black, especially if he follows up with 11 dxe5 (or 11 d5 ♔d4) 11...♔xe5! 12 ♙e2 b5, as recommended by David Vigorito in *Attacking Chess: The King's Indian*.

**10...♔e5 11 ♔d4**



It's worth pausing at this moment and slipping into 'How Good is Your Chess?' mode. Black would like to hit back with 11...c5, but after 12 dxc6 bxc6 is 13 f4 a problem? See how far you can calculate.

**11...c5! 12 dxc6**

The critical test, if new, which is testament to the ineffectiveness of 9 ♔d1 as much as anything else. Previously, 12 ♔c2 ♙d7 13 a4 e6 14 dxe6 ♙xe6 15 ♔a3 ♜b6! had left Black calling the shots in Formanek-W.Watson, London 1982.

**12...bxc6**

Six points. 12...♔xc6 was possible, but fails to challenge White who must be slightly for choice with his Maroczy Bind after 13 ♙e2.

**13 f4 c5**

The only consistent follow-up. Deduct your score if you let the knight hang or moved it to g4 and saw c6 fall.

**14 fxe5 cxd4 15 ♙xd4 ♔g4**

The most aggressive square for the knight, although even in the event of 15...♔d7 16 exd6 ♙xd4 17 ♜xd4 ♜xb2 18 dxe7 ♜xe7 Black must have pretty decent compensation for the pawn.

**16 exd6 ♙xd4 17 ♜xd4**

Take two bonus points if you visualised this far and a further four if you analysed Wallace's next, as most impressively he had back on move 12.

**17...♜xb2!?**

Continuing in aggressive vein, although the simple 17...exd6 wasn't so terrible, and if 18 ♜d2 ♙b7 followed by ...f5.

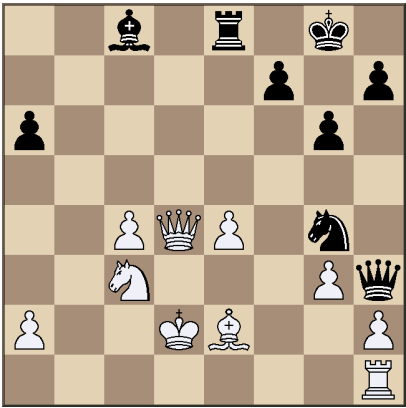
**18 dxe7**

Sensibly Edouard decides to catch up in



development. The critical line was 18 d7! ♖xd7 19 ♜xd7 ♜a5! (19...♜b6 20 ♜d4! defends) 20 ♜xe8+ ♔g7 when Black is attacking, but is a rook and piece in arrears. It was this position that Wallace was trying to visualise back at move 12. He had decided that 21 ♜d3 ♜b1+ (21...♜b6 also comes up just short: 22 ♖e2 ♜f2+ 23 ♖d1 ♖e3+ 24 ♖c1 ♜xe2 25 ♖xe2 ♜xe2, and now 26 ♜a4! ♜xd3 27 ♜b3 denies Black even perpetual chances) 22 ♖d2 ♜b4 (if 22...♜g5+ 23 ♖e2 ♜b2 24 ♖e1) should give Black enough counterplay. It's hard to fault such an assessment and evidently Edouard agreed, but the ice-calm silicon may be correct that 23 ♜a4 ♜b2+ 24 ♖c1 ♜b1+ 25 ♖xb1! ♜xa4 26 ♜d2 ♖e3 27 ♖e2 doesn't give Black enough.

**18...♜xe7 19 ♖e2 ♜h4+ 20 g3 ♜h3 21 ♜d2 ♜xd2 22 ♖xd2**

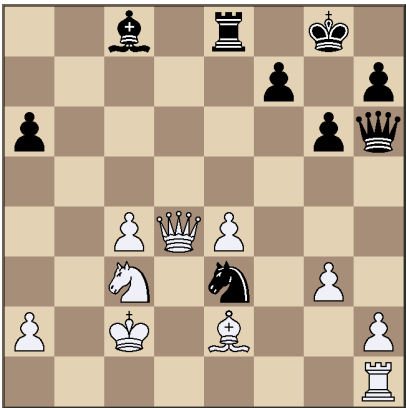


After a few fairly logical moves, my engine assures me that the position is '0.00', which might be true if you have no sense of fear, but it's very hard to believe Edouard was enjoying himself. Quite simply, White's position contains a number of weaknesses and his king will do well to find a safe home.

**22...♜h6+ 23 ♖c2**

23 ♖d3!? ♖e5+ 24 ♖c2 ♖c6 25 ♜c5 is just the sort of line which only a computer could proclaim to be in White's favour. Probably this should have been tried, but even here 'unclear' will be this annotator's cop-out.

**23...♖e3+**



**24 ♖b1?!**

It's instructive that running the king towards the corner doesn't help White. He would also have been in trouble after 24 ♖b3 ♖e6: for example, 25 ♜b6 ♜g5 26 a3 ♜c8, and if 27 ♖d5 ♖xd5 28 exd5 ♜e5 followed by ...♜b8. However, remarkably, there was a defence: 24 ♖d3! (yes, this bold advance again – if this whets your appetite for some active play with the king, then you should enjoy Carl Strugnell's piece later in this pages) 24...♖f5 25 ♜f2! when I haven't managed to find a blow for Black. He can go 25...♖e6 26 ♖f3 ♖d6, but after 27 ♖d5 ♖xd5 28 cxd5 f5 29 exf5 ♜g5 30 ♖g2! ♜g4 31 ♜c1 White should be able to escape with a draw.

**24...♖g4!**

It's always nice to develop a bishop late and with a threat. Suddenly White realises that 25 ♖xg4 ♜b8+ would leave his king without a good square, but in any case it's about to feel the heat.

**25 ♜d2 ♖xe2 26 ♜xe2 ♜g5**

Wallace is still a pawn down, but is going to regain it on c4 and only the one king is in trouble.

**27 ♖e1 ♖xc4! 28 ♖a1**

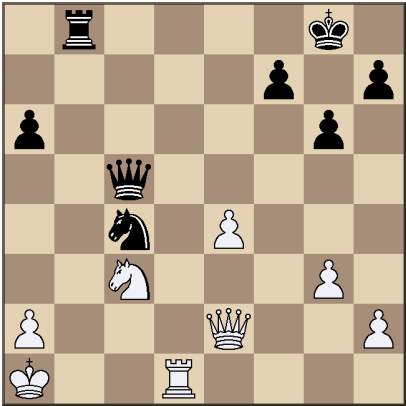
The king desperately tries to hide. In-

stead, 28 ♜xc4? ♜d2 would have been an immediate killer.

**28...♜c5 29 ♜d1?!**

29 ♜d3 looks like a stouter defence, and if 29...♜b8 30 ♜b1.

**29...♜b8**



**30 ♜b1? ♜c8**

After such a complex game, the players were by now relying on just the 30-second increment each move, but even so one might have expected Black to have found the terminal 30...♜xb1+ 31 ♖xb1 ♖a3+ 32



*John Paul Wallace calculated very deeply against Romain Edouard.*

♖b2 ♖b4+.

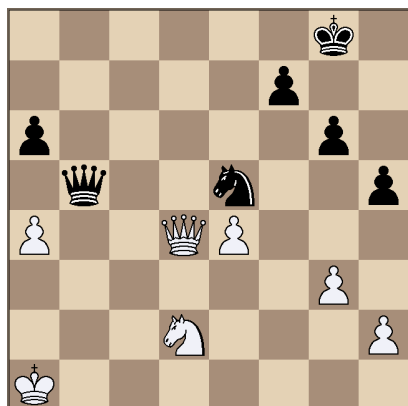
**31 ♖c1 ♖d4 32 ♖d1 ♖f6**

And here there was 32...♖d2, but it's not easy with a hanging flag and with the psychological pressure generated by facing an opponent some 250 points higher.

**33 ♖f1 ♖b6 34 ♖e2 ♖d4 35 ♖d1 ♖f6 36 ♖f1 ♖b6 37 ♖e2 ♖e5 38 ♖d2 ♖b4? 39 ♖b1! ♖b8 40 ♖xc8+ ♖xc8**

Somehow Edouard has survived and, with the time control reached, must have been feeling much more confident, although Black can continue to press, thanks to his better structure and safer king.

**41 ♖c3 ♖b8 42 ♖d2 ♖b5 43 ♖d4 h5 44 a4**



**44...♖e2?**

The queen ending is just a draw. As such, Black should have preferred 44...♖a5, and if 45 ♖b2 ♖c6! 46 ♖b3 ♖xd4 47 ♖xa5 ♖f3 48 h3 ♖g5 49 ♖c6 ♖xh3 50 a5 g5, retaining some chances in the knight endgame.

**45 ♖xe5 ♖xd2 46 ♖e8+ ♖g7 47 ♖e5+ ♖g8 48 ♖e8+ ♖g7 49 ♖e5+ ♖h7 50 ♖f6 ♖c1+ 51 ♖a2 ♖c4+ 52 ♖a3 a5 53 ♖e7**

Keeping everything under control. Wallace is able to win a pawn, but only at the cost of allowing a perpetual.

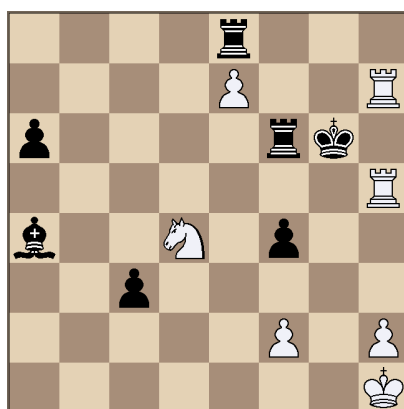
**53...♖c3+ 54 ♖a2 ♖g7 55 ♖e8 ♖c2+ 56 ♖a3 ♖xh2 57 ♖e5+ ♖h7 58 ♖f4 ♖g7 59 ♖e5+ f6 60 ♖c7+ ♖h6 61 ♖f4+ ♖g7 ½-½**

Both Cheddleton and Guildford may have entered their match in good spirits, but rating can count and so it proved as the 2589-rated 'southerners' saw off the 'northerners' who could but muster an average rating of 2431; such is the gulf between a professional team and a top-notch professional team. It was Guildford who drew first blood with Romain Edouard making excellent, aggressive use of his kingside pawns to pose the hapless Colovic too many problems. As for the opening; well, Romain has a sense of humour and so selected the English Defence.

Elsewhere, Matthew Sadler saw his enterprising early gambit neutralised by Jonathan Hawkins, although a draw as black on

board 1 is rarely a bad result; Robin van Kampen and Antoaneta Stefanova won smoothly; and Eric Hansen and Jean-Pierre Le Roux were also victorious for Guildford, albeit with a dose of fortune and practicality being required to see off Vladimir Hamitevici and Keith Arkell respectively. In the end it finished 6-2 to Guildford after Mark Hebden's switch to 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 backfired against Simon Williams (maybe the Barry Attack has had its day?), while board 2 almost ended with a lovely mating combination.

## G.Jones-D.Eggleston Guildford vs. Cheddleton



Suffice to say that play has been quite scrappy, and the position is still very complex with White having just doubled rooks. Will Black perish due to the passed e-pawn and his exposed king, or might the c-pawn tip the balance in his favour?

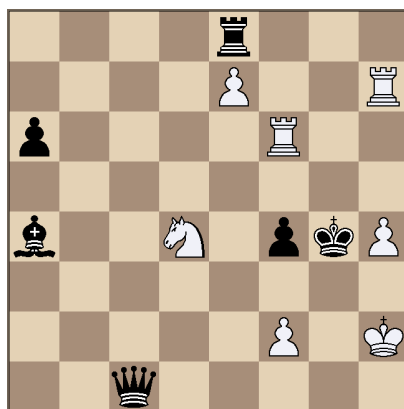
**47...c2?**

Very natural, but Eggleston had to find 47...♖xe7! when 48 ♖5h6+ ♖g5 leaves White with nothing better than perpetual as 49 h4+? ♖g4 50 ♖xf6? can now be met by 50...♖xh7.

**48 ♖5h6+ ♖g5 49 ♖h5+ ♖g6**

A little repetition to emphasise who's boss whilst gaining an extra 60 seconds of thinking time, but Jones already had in mind the following stunning blow.

**50 ♖5h6+ ♖g5 51 h4+! ♖g4 52 ♖xf6! c1♖+ 53 ♖h2**



Black is queen for rook ahead, but his king is stuck in a mating net with 54 f3# and 54 ♖g6# the immediate concerns.

**53...f3 54 ♖g7+ ♖h5 55 ♖xf3**

"Keeping it simple. I thought 55 ♖e2!! to be too flashy, but the engine shows that it leads to mate", rued Jones after the game. Indeed, this further sacrifice would have aesthetically concluded a wonderful late attack. Black is absolutely defenceless, in view of 55...fxe2 56 ♖h7+ ♖g4 57 f3# and 55...♖d2 56 ♖g3!.

**55...♖c2 56 ♖g3 ♖e4 57 ♖g5+ ♖xg5+ 58 hxg5?**

Eggleston has done well to find the only moves to stay on the board and now the game will continue. Instead, 58 ♖xg5! ♖xe7 59 ♖e6 would have continued to pursue the mating attack to win the exchange and the game.

**58...♖xf3 59 ♖f4! ♖h4 60 g6**

Fortunately for Jones, he still has some chances thanks to his g-pawn and the position of the black king.

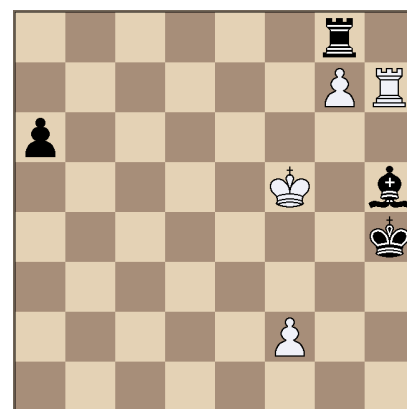
**60...♖xe7 61 ♖f7!**

Continuing to play for the win. I'm sure that your engine will prefer the mundane 61 ♖xf3, but after 61...♖g5 62 ♖xa6 ♖f5 the England no.4 was rather concerned that this was just a dead drawn rook endgame, since the white rook is tied to the defence of g6.

**61...♖e8?**

Now White wins by a tempo. Material is not for once the overriding concern in this endgame and, as such, 61...♖e1! 62 ♖xf3 ♖h5 63 g7 ♖g1 would have drawn.

**62 ♖h7+ ♖h5 63 g7 ♖g8 64 ♖f5**



Black is a piece for a pawn ahead, but his bishop and king aren't playing, and the a-pawn is just too slow to save him.

**64...a5 65 ♖f6 a4 66 ♖h8 ♖xg7 67 ♖xg7 ♖g4 68 f3+! ♖h4 69 f4**

The f-pawn decides.

**69...a3 70 ♖f6 ♖g4 71 f5 ♖h4 72 ♖a8 ♖g4 73 ♖xa3 ♖h5 74 ♖g3 ♖e2 75 ♖g7 ♖h4 76 ♖g6 1-0**

Not wishing to see their second team flirt with relegation, long-time 4NCL powerhouse Wood Green supplied a young Norwegian FM, two GMs and a strong IM, which helped them to edge out Grantham



Sharks 4½-3½. However, as well as Guildford, the February weekend belonged to Barbican II who crushed Oxford 6-2, despite the first of two fine dark-blue results for Aidan Rawlinson, and then downed their fellow second team 5-3. There Graham Morrison won the all-Scottish clash on board 4 against John Shaw, Giampaolo Buchicchio defeated another GM in the shape of Ketevan Arakhamia-Grant, and fine wins on the lower boards for David Coleman and Kanwal Bhatia more than compensated for Wood Green's wins on 1 and 3.

Bar a major upset when Barbican II take on King's Head, it seems which four teams will progress from Pool A to the Promotion Pool is clear. However, the other teams all have work to do to avoid the drop, beginning with a potential 'four-pointer' in round 7 between Wood Green and Blackthorne, who should welcome back Simon Ansell, to whom and his partner Maria Yurenok we must extend our congratulations on the recent birth of their son.

### Pool B

Andrew Greet may have replaced long-time supremo Brian Smith as Wood Green cap-

tain, but they remain a pretty tough act. The London-based side don't give the impression of having quite as much sponsorship as in years gone by, but their seven GMs and one IM were still too strong for Guildford II.

The gap in average rating may have only been 47 points, but it was Wood Green who appeared to really want the victory, possibly due to having more of a regular, stable team than their opponents. David Howell had to fight a rearguard action to hold Le Roux on top board, but Guildford fail to land a blow there and on the next four boards, whereas Wood Green wrapped up an undefeated, impressive 5½-2½ victory with wins on the bottom boards for Alexander Cherniaev, Jovanka Houska and John Emms.

### G.Wall-J.Houska Guildford II vs. Wood Green *Caro-Kann Defence*

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 f3 e6**

Instead, 3...dxe4 4 fxe4 e5 5 ♖f3 ♙g4 was recommended in Houska's popular *Play the Caro-Kann*, but a new edition is currently in the works and perhaps the text will



Mark Ferguson is enjoying a decent season for Barbican, unlike many of his team.

be the move of choice there.

Yet another option is 3...♗b6!?, which became quite trendy after games like Ivan-chuk-Jobava, Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010, although there 4 a3 (4 ♖c3 e6 would transpose to our main game) 4...e5 5 exd5 ♖f6! 6 dxe5 ♙c5? 7 exf6 ♙f2+ 8 ♙e2 0-0 9 ♗d2 ♙e8+ 10 ♙d1 did see Black coming up short.

**4 ♖c3**

Now Black usually pins with the Winaw-eresque 4...♙b4 or fianchettoes the queen's bishop, but once again the queen can also move.

**4...♗b6!? 5 ♖ge2!?**

Gavin Wall is a very creative player who tends to have his own systems quite well worked out. The knight is bound to f4 to press on d5, hoping to dissuade both ...c5 and ...♙b4, and to leap to h5 at a timely moment. This looks more challenging than 5 a3, which has been more popular, and can lead to a rather French-like scenario after 5...♖f6 6 e5 ♖fd7 7 ♖ce2 c5 8 c3 ♖c6 9 f4.

**5...♖f6 6 ♖f4**



**6...dxe4**

The ...♗b6 lines are full of fertile territory and, indeed, this is already a novelty. Previously, 6...a6 7 ♙e2 ♙e7 8 ♗d3 0-0 9 exd5? (9 a4 c5! 10 a5 ♗c7 appears to open the position in Black's favour, so perhaps White should prefer 9 ♙e3!?) 9...cxd5 10 ♗b1 ♖c6 11 ♙e3 ♖e8! 12 0-0 ♖d6 had left Black in control in the game Cabanas Jimenez-Almagro Llamas, Madrid 2010.

Keeping the centre closed so until after castling makes good sense for the second player, although it is possible to open the position too, whether à la Houska or with 6...c5!?. A sample line runs 7 dxc5 ♙xc5 8 ♖a4 ♙f2+ 9 ♙e2 ♗d4 10 ♗xd4 ♙xd4 11 c3 ♙e5 12 exd5 ♖xd5 13 ♖xd5 exd5 when the IQP may be offset by the small loss of time White must incur bringing his knight back into play.

**7 fxe4 ♙b4?!**

Even those used to leading the England women's team don't find new, slightly irrational positions easy to navigate over the board. White takes control after the text, so

Black might prefer the thematic counter-strike 7...e5!, and if 8 dxe5 ♖g4 9 ♖d3 ♗a6 10 ♗e2 h5!? with a complex struggle ahead.

**8 e5 ♖d5 9 ♗d3**

Perhaps this position is playable for Black, but g7 is going to be hit and the lack of queenside development is also a cause for concern.

**9...c5!**

Black absolutely must develop some counterplay, and Houska is up to the task.

**10 a3**

Another very natural move, but one might also make a decent case for 10 ♖fxd5!? exd5 11 a3, with the idea of 11...♗xc3+ 12 ♗xc3!.

**10...♗xc3+ 11 bxc3 ♖c6**



## British Chess Championships 2014

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After some highly-creative if also principled play from both sides, we've reached a critical position. White's centre is under some pressure, but will he be able to strike on the dark squares before it collapses?

**12 ♖h5! cxd4!**

Much better to flee with the king to relative sanctuary on the queenside than face 12...g6 13 ♖g7+ ♖f8 14 ♗h6 ♗g8 15 ♖h5!.

**13 ♖xg7+ ♗d8 14 ♗g5+?!**

Wall is after the black king, but it was time for White to switch goals, complete development and be happy with a pleasant edge after 14 cxd4! ♗xd4 (14...♖xd4? 15 c4 will win material down the d-file) 15 ♗xd4 ♖xd4 16 ♗d3. Even here Black's king might well feel the pressure, so perhaps she would have had to grab with 16...♖c6 17 0-0 ♖xe5, but clearly 18 ♗e4 ♗g8 19 ♗b2 ♗xg7 20 ♗xe5 would grant White excellent compensation with those dominant bishops.

**14...♗c7 15 c4?**

The problem with closing the centre is that it helps the black king become much safer. Once again, 15 cxd4 was indicated, even if 15...♗g8! may now be OK for Black as 16 ♗xh7 no longer threatens to capture the rook with check.

**15...♗a5+ 16 ♖f2 ♖e3!**

Good pragmatic play from Houska. Black is happy to see an exchange on e3 as then e5 would fall, leaving her with much the better endgame.

**17 ♗f6?**

White had, though, to go in for the exchanges. Now it will be his king which finds itself in something of a firing line.

**17...♖xe5 18 ♗xd4**

This drops a piece, but 18 ♗xe5+ ♗xe5 would have corralled that once great attacker on g7.

**18...♖3g4+ 19 ♖g1 ♖xf6 20 c5 ♖fd7 21 ♖d6+ ♗d8 22 ♖d1**

Black is tied down thanks to the pin, but she is just a piece up and Houska had no difficulties wrapping up proceedings.

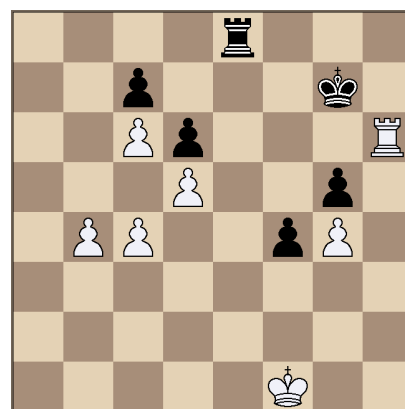
**22...♗c3 23 ♗b5 ♗g8 24 h4 ♗e3+ 25 ♖f1 ♗f4+ 26 ♖g1 ♖f3+! 0-1**

One might have thought Wood Green could also slip up the next day, facing Barbican, but again they

were unbeaten, making an impressive 6-2. Howell took full advantage of some early over-experimentalism from Matthew Turner, Sam Franklin was out-calculated by the author of *Grandmaster Preparation: Calculation*, Jacob Aagaard, on board 2, and Bogdan Lalic and John Emms also won their games.

Barbican were missing Sam Collins and Lorin D'Costa, but they are having an unusually disappointing season. Indeed, in contrast to their second team, they may not even make the promotion pool. Having too many players out of form certainly contributed to their 5-3 defeat at the hands of e2e4 in round 5, a surprise result which must have left captain and rare in-form Barbican player Mark Ferguson scratching his head.

### M.Ferguson-P.Mladenov Barbican vs. e2e4



White might calmly retreat his rook to h2, but Ferguson found something much stronger, trusting in the power of connected passed pawns on the sixth.

**48 ♗xd6! cxd6 49 b5 ♖f6**

There's absolutely no stopping the pawns, as shown too by 49...♗e4 50 b6 ♗xc4 51 b7 ♗b4 52 c7.

**50 b6 ♖e5 51 b7 ♗b8 52 c7 ♗xb7 53 c8 ♗b3 54 ♗f5+ ♗d4 55 ♗xg5 ♖e4 56 ♗f5+ ♖f3 57 ♗c2 1-0**

In contrast to Pool A, there's all to play for in Pool B come the final, seventh round. Will e2e4 be able to maintain their excellent form against Cambridge, will Barbican bounce back against 3Cs, and what will happen in the always tense encounter between White Rose and Guildford II? The Yorkshire side at least reduced their relegation fears by importing a Bulgarian Grandmaster for the February weekend and, led by Dejan Bojkov, overcame both Grantham Sharks II and Cambridge.

A full report on the March weekend will be in our next issue, and don't forget that you can watch live and even download all the games courtesy of [www.4ncl.co.uk](http://www.4ncl.co.uk).