

Report on Divisions 3 and 4 Weekend 4, 2016-17 by Steve Burke

On Saturday, Wood Green completed their clean sweep in Division 3Sa. Meanwhile Wessex drew to take second place, as third placed Poisoned Pawns lost to Brown Jack. That result meant that MK Phoenix needed to win to go into the promotion group, which they did (by the narrowest of margins) against Surbiton.

In Division 3Sb Fermented Sharks and Anglian Avengers 2 dropped their first points when drawing their match to finish first and second respectively. Leeds University Old Boys beat Shropshire to secure third spot, while the latter go through by one game point after Cambridge University could only draw their last match.



On Sunday, the promotion groups started largely as might be expected with Wood Green and Fermented Sharks beating the bottom two qualifiers. The two mid-table matches went the way of Wessex and the Poisoned Pawns. The team ratings suggest that it's a three horse race for second place, but we'll see.

The battle to avoid the drop in the relegation group looks like being a very tense affair. Sussex Martlets 2 put in a great performance to beat Surbiton and increase their chances, but only Brown Jack look like being comfortable to me.

In the North, Manchester Manticores 1 moved on to the full 14 points, but had a couple of surprisingly close victories this weekend. Manx Liberty, Gonzaga and Manchester Manticores 2 kept up the pressure. I assume that by now the top teams will have all played each other, so it looks like being a case of who can keep their nerve against the lower teams to decide the two promotion teams in the final weekend.

In Division 4 South, it's looking likely that there will be three or four promotion places up for grabs (depending on who is relegated from Division 2). Oxford 2 are in prime spot to take one, after beating Barnet Knights in the top clash of Round 8 to go two points clear. The Full Ponty had a rough weekend, picking up just 1 point, but are still in third; while half a dozen other teams are within a couple of points of them. Should be an exciting climax to the season!

Star Game

[Download the below game in PGN](#)

**Onley,David E (2137) - Swanson,Stephen (2185) [B06]
Brown Jack v Poisoned Pawns Reading, ENG (7.12), 18.03.2017
[Burke,Steven J & Komodo 10]**

With a fierce battle raging for places in the promotion group, this was obviously a tense affair. Both sides had their chances and there was a twist or two in the tail!

1.e4 g6 2.d4 Bg7 3.Nc3 d6 4.Be3 a6 5.Qd2 Nd7 6.0-0-0 b5



The battle lines are drawn up. White has a lead in development and central control, while black sees his target sitting on the queenside.

7.f3 Bb7 8.h4 White chooses to strike early on the kingside, perhaps deterring black from castling. An alternative idea, seen often in the Sicilian, would be to improve the king's position with 8.Kb1 and wait to see what black intends to do with his?

8...h5 9.Nh3 c6 If black calls white's bluff and goes ahead with kingside castling, 9...Ngf6 10.Ng5 0-0 11.Kb1 the game would likely take on the appearance of a Dragon after 11...c5 12.dxc5 Nxc5

10.Bd3 Qc7 11.Kb1 e5?!



With this move the game takes on something of the appearance of a Black Lion Philidor, where the black king sits comfortably in the centre, though here it doesn't have the protection of a bishop on e7. Heading for a Dragon with 11...Ngf6 12.-- 0-0 13.-- c5 is Komodo's choice here.

12.dxe5 dxe5 The alternative recapture 12...Nxe5 intending 13.-- 0-0-0 also leads to interesting positions where white apparently has the upper hand for now, but there's plenty of scope for that to change.

13.Ne2 Ngf6 14.c4



14...Rd8?! Black could take the bull by the horns with 14...0-0 15.Ng5 Rfc8+/- but if black isn't going to castle here, then leaving the rook on the a-file and relocating the king's bishop with 14...Bf8 15.-- Be7 looks more in line with Black Lion setups.

15.cxb5+/- White is still better after this, but GM Maurice Ashley regularly advises in his tournament commentaries not to exchange unless there is an actual benefit. Here Komodo agrees and prefers something like 15.Ng5 0-0 16.Qc3 Rc8 17.Rd2 Qb8 18.Rhd1+/-

15...axb5 16.Qb4?! This gives black a tempo to bring his bishop back into the game, so the immediate 16.Qc3, threatening 17.Bxb5, seems to keep the initiative better.

16...Bf8 17.Qc3



17...Qb8+/= Black could have defended the pawn more actively with 17...Ba6! because after 18.Rc1? (18.Ng5 c5<=>) he has the tactical shot 18...Nc5!! 19.Bxc5 (19.Bc2 b4 20.Qxb4 Nd3! 21.Bb6 Qb7 22.Qb3 Nxc1 23.Nxc1 Rd7=/+) 19...b4! 20.Bb6 (20.Qxb4? Bxd3+ 21.Ka1 Bxe2 22.Bb6 Qb8-/+) 20...bxc3 21.Bxc7 Bxd3+ 22.Ka1 Bxe2 23.Bxd8 Kxd8 24.Rxc3 Bb5=/+

18.Ng5 Be7 19.Rhg1 Komodo is happy with solid central play 19.Rd2 Rc8 20.Rhd1+/= There seems to be a wild alternative in 19.g4!? which might well be good for white with best play, e.g. 19...hxg4 20.h5 Rxh5 (20...gxh5? 21.Ng3 c5 22.Nf5 gxf3 23.Qb3 Bd5 24.exd5 c4 25.Bxc4 bxc4 26.Qxc4 Qb4 27.Qc2+/-) 21.Ng3 Rxh1 22.Rxh1 Nf8 23.Qb3! Rxd3! 24.Qxd3+/=

19...Qa8?!



19...Ba8 allows black to meet 20.g4 with 20...c5!~~

20.Qb3? Attractive, but black is given a chance to slip away with equal chances. White had a chance here to play 20.g4! Ba6 (20...hxg4?! 21.fxc4 Ba6 (21...Rxh4?? 22.Qb3+-) 22.h5 c5! 23.hxc6 fxc6 24.Qa5+/-) 21.gxh5 Nxh5 22.Qb3 Rf8+/=

20...Rf8?? Black should have vacated the centre now, 20...0-0! 21.g4 hxg4 22.fxc4 c5<=

21.Nc3?! Black is completely tied up after 21.Rc1!+/-

21...Ba6?! Black could try to unravel with 21...Bc5!?



22.Rge1

White has a couple of sacrificial lines here.

a) 22.Ne6!? fxe6 23.Qxe6+ Be7 24.Bxb5!! Rf7 (The second piece is poisoned, 24...cxb5?? 25.Nxb5 Rc8 26.Nd6+ Kd8 27.Bb6+ Rc7 28.Nb5+/-) 25.Bc4 Rh7 26.Rd6 Nf8 27.Rxd8+ Qxd8 28.Qxe5+/-

b) 22.Nxb5!? cxb5 23.Bxc5 Nxc5 24.Bxb5+ Bc6 25.Rxd8+ Kxd8 26.Qc4 Bxb5 (26...Nfd7 27.Nxf7+ Ke7 28.Nxe5 Bxb5 29.Qxb5 Nxe5 30.Qxc5+ Ke6 31.Rd1+/-) 27.Rd1+ Ncd7 28.Qxb5+/-

22...Bxe3 23.Rxe3 Qa7 24.Ree1 Nc5 25.Qc2 Nfd7+/-

22.g4? Timing is everything in chess and this turns out to be the wrong time for this break. White can maintain a strong grip on the position with 22.Rc1 intending Rgd1, and meeting black's only active try 22...b4!? with 23.Bxa6 Qxa6 24.Na4 Ra8 25.Nc5+/-

22...hxg4! 23.fxg4



23...Bc5?? Timing again - earlier we saw this was a good try, but here white's sacrifice is stronger. Black had the chance now to fight for the initiative with 23...b4! 24.Na4 (24.Bxa6 Qxa6 25.Qa4 Ra8 26.Qxa6 Rxa6 27.Ne2 c5=+/) 24...c5 25.Bxa6 Qxa6 26.Rc1 Qa5 27.Rgf1 Rc8<=>

24.Ne6!! fxe6 25.Qxe6+ Be7



and black would be okay if it wasn't for...

26.g5!! b4? Black lashes out but this should just hasten the end.

Black is in serious trouble, even after the best defence 26...Qc8 27.Be2 Nb8 Perhaps simplest is to go for the ending, 28.Qxc8 Bxc8 29.gxf6 Rxf6 30.h5 Rxd1+ 31.Nxd1 Be6 (31...gxh5 32.Bxh5+ Kf8 33.Bg5+/-) 32.hxg6 Kf8 33.Bg5 Bc5 34.Rg2 Rxg6 35.Be7+ Kxe7 36.Rxg6+/-

27.gxf6?? Instead black is rewarded handsomely for his last move as white blunders, and suddenly the tables are turned! White is winning after 27.Bxa6!!



27...Qxa6 (27...bxc3 28.Bc4! Qb7 (The knight can't run away 28...Ng8?? 29.Qxg6+ Rf7 30.Qxf7#) 29.Bb3 Rc8 30.gxf6 Rxf6 31.Qg8+ Nf8 32.bxc3+/-) 28.Nd5! Nxd5 29.exd5 Ra8 30.d6 Qxa2+ 31.Qxa2 Rxa2 32.Kxa2 Bd8 33.Rdf1+-

White retains a nice advantage after the simpler 27.Ne2 Rf7 (27...Bc8?! 28.gxf6 Nxf6 29.Qxe5 Ng4 30.Qg3+/-) 28.gxf6 Rxf6 29.Qg8+ Nf8 30.Nc1 Bxd3+ 31.Rxd3 Rxd3 32.Nxd3 Qa6 33.Qb3+/=

27...Rxf6 28.Qg8+ Nf8 29.Bxa6 Qxa6 30.Rxd8+ Bxd8 31.Nd1 Qd3+



After white's forcing sequence runs out, black now takes over.

32.Ka1 Qxe4 33.Bg5? Better is 33.Bh6 Be7 34.Ne3 Qxh4 35.Bxf8 Bxf8 (35...Rxf8??) 36.Qb3-/+

33...Rf3! Here 33...Bb6 34.Bxf6 Bxg1-/+ is also good for black.

34.Bh6 Qd5! Even better was 34...Be7!! when everything is nicely defended and black is a pawn up with the better position.

35.Qh8



35...Rf7?? This gives white the chance to get his knight back into active play. 35...Qc5 36.Rh1 (36.Re1? Bf6-+) 36...Be7-/+ leaves white struggling to find moves.

36.Re1?? The players may have been playing on the 30 second increment by now. White needed to play 36.Ne3! Qe6 37.Bxf8 Rxf8 38.Qh6 Rf6 39.Rd1~/=

36...Bf6! 37.Qg8 Bxh4!



Perhaps white missed that his rook is attacked after this capture when playing Re1?

38.Ne3 Qc5?? Three moves to the time control and black misses the beautiful winning move 38...Rf1!! 39.Qxd5 (39.Rxf1 Qxg8 40.Rxf8+ Qxf8 41.Bxf8 Kxf8-+) 39...Rxe1+ 40.Qd1 Rxd1+ 41.Nxd1 g5-+

Not only that, but black picked one of the worst squares for his queen. The game rolls on after, say 38...Qe6 39.Bxf8 Bxe1 40.Bxb4+ Kd7 41.Bxe1 Rf3!~/=

39.Rd1! Rf6?? After this there is no further reprieve. Here black needed to find 39...Rd7! although white may be winning anyway after 40.Rf1! Be7 41.Bxf8 Bxf8 as he seems to be

winning the material after 42.Ng4! For example 42...Rg7 43.Qe6+ Kd8 44.Qf6+ Kc7 45.Qxf8 Qxf8 46.Rxf8+/- and it looks as if the piece will easily outweigh the pawns.

40.Ng4! Rf7 41.Bxf8 Qxf8 42.Qxg6 Qe7 43.Nh6 Qf6 44.Qh5



1-0