

Report on Divisions 3 and 4 Weekend 1 *by Steve Burke*

So here we are again at the start of a new season, full of hopes and expectations. I've noticed several new names in the various divisions, but I'm not sure how many are made up of new players to the 4NCL. One team that did catch my eye (particularly as I play in the North these days) is the Castleford Roses, which is made up almost entirely of Czech and Slovak players. It used to be the Vikings that took over our northern towns ☺ They received a harsh reception from the Mercians of Warwickshire in round 1, but bounced back to win the War of the Roses against Manchester on Sunday.



The new venue in the North at Doncaster provided excellent playing conditions and the refreshments were kept well stocked, so far as I saw.

A new pairing system is being tried in this Division, which seeds teams and aims to keep the top teams apart until the later weekends. There were no surprises on the Saturday, but on Sunday a couple of the "mid-table" teams (Jorvik and Cheddleton 2) did create minor upsets. We'll see how things develop in the coming rounds.

Division 3 North

	P	W	D	L	GP	Pts
Shropshire 1	2	2	0	0	10	4
3Cs 2	2	2	0	0	9	4
Gonzaga	2	2	0	0	8½	4
Cheddleton 2	2	2	0	0	8	4
Jorvik	2	1	1	0	6½	3

In Division 3 South there were also few surprise results, with Sussex Martlets 2 in Pool B being the only team to take both points against the odds.

3 South pool A

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Barnet Knights 1					4-2			5½--½	9½	4
2 Wessex A						4-2	4½-½		8½	4
3 Rhyfelwyr Essyllwg						3½-2½	4-2		7½	4
4 Anglian Avengers 2					2½-3½			5-1	7½	2
5 Cambridge University 2	2-4			3½-2½					5½	2
6 Hackney		2-4	2½-3½						4½	0
7 Leeds University Old Boys		½-4½	2-4						2½	0
8 The Full Ponty	-½-5½			1-5					½	0

3 South pool B

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 CSC 1				3-3				6-0	9	3
2 Oxford 2				3-3				4½-1½	7½	3
3 MK Phoenix 1					4-2		3-3		7	3
4 Brown Jack 1	3-3	3-3							6	2
5 Fermented Sharks			2-4			4-2			6	2
6 Sussex Martlets 2					2-4		3½-2½		5½	2
7 The Rookies			3-3			2½-3½			5½	1
8 West is Best 3	0-6	1½-4½							1½	0

Upsets were also thin on the ground in Division 4 South. However The Pitstop defied the odds in a match where all six boards were decisive results, while All Anands on Deck were helped by a default on board 6, but won the top five boards 3-2 anyway.

Division 4 South

	P	W	D	L	GP	Pts
The Pitstop	2	2	0	0	10	4
Iceni 1	2	2	0	0	9½	4
Oxford 3	2	2	0	0	9½	4
Watford	2	2	0	0	9	4
Wessex B	2	2	0	0	8½	4
All Anands on Deck	2	2	0	0	8	4
Crowthorne	2	2	0	0	7½	4
CSC 2	2	2	0	0	7½	4

Star Game

[Download the below game in PGN](#)

Clarke,Stuart W (2241) - O'Neill,Paul Sean (1956) [C54]
4NCL Division 3 North Doncaster, ENG (1.41), 11.11.2017
[Burke,Steven J with the aid of Komodo 11]

With the early rounds in the north being seeded, there were many decisive games. I've chosen one near miss for the underdog, which hopefully has some instructive value too.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.c3 Nf6 5.d3 h6!?



Not a bad move, but far less popular (and also less successful) than the three top choices here. I believe this is because in some lines black can save a tempo by not playing this move at all.

6.0-0 0-0 Still okay for black, though having prevented Bg5, the current trend is to play 6...d6 here. The bishop no longer needs to be able to drop back to e7 to break a pin, so it can stay on the more active diagonal.

7.b4 Bd6?! This move is frowned upon by Komodo, with the more active placement 7...Bb6 to be followed by 8.-- d6 being preferred.

8.Re1 Ne7 Interestingly Komodo prefers to provoke a change in pawn formation before dropping the knight back with 8...a5 9.b5 Ne7; Stockfish goes so far as to give up a tempo with 8...Be7!? when it seems that that 9.b5 can be met by the pawn sacrifice 9...Na5 10.Nxe5 Nxc4 11.Nxc4 d5 12.exd5 Nxd5~/= with good compensation.

9.d4 Ng6 10.h4!?N



10...Qe7?! Komodo suggests that white's aggressive move should be met with 10...h5+/=

11.Bb3?! [11.g3! a5 12.h5 Nxh5 13.Nxe5 Nxe5 14.dxe5 Bxe5 (14...Qxe5? 15.f4+/-) 15.Qxh5 axb4 16.Be3 bxc3 17.f4+/-]

11...c6?! This gives white another chance to play g3. It seems that black could now seize the initiative with 11...a5! preventing white from continuing his attacking ideas, e.g. 12.h5? Nxh5 13.Nxe5 Nxe5 14.Qxh5 (Compared to the previous variation with 11.g3, here white cannot play 14.dxe5?? Qxe5 15.g3 Nxg3! (also very good is 15...axb4 16.f4 Qa5!-+) 16.fxg3 Qxg3+ 17.Kf1 a4-+ Black has three pawns and an exposed white king for his knight.) 14...Nd3 15.Rf1 Qxe4 16.Bd5 Qh7-/+

After 11...a5! white should probably bring up his reserves before pushing the h-pawn, so 12.bxa5 Rxa5 13.Nbd2 b5 14.Nf1 Bb7 15.Ng3+/-

12.h5!? Forcing, but 12.g3! preparing the h-pawn push was still to be preferred according to the engines.

12...Nxh5 13.Nbd2 Bc7



14.Nc4?=/+ Enticing to bring in another piece to attack e5, but white needed to exchange immediately on that square to keep full compensation for his pawn, 14.Nxe5! Nxe5 15.dxe5 Qxe5 16.Nf3 Qe7 17.e5~/=

14...exd4! 15.Nxd4 Nhf4



16.Nf3?? Black was threatening to take over on the kingside, but a better defence was 16.g3 Nh3+ 17.Kf1 with a complex position. Black could even sacrifice a couple of pieces with 17...Nxf2!? 18.Kxf2 d5 (18...Bxg3+ 19.Kxg3 Qh4+ 20.Kg2 d5 21.Rh1 Qxe4+ 22.Qf3 Qxf3+ 23.Nxf3 dxc4 24.Bxc4 Re8~/=) 19.Ne3 (19.exd5?? Bxg3+ 20.Kxg3 Qh4+ 21.Kg2 Bh3+ winning.) 19...Bxg3+ 20.Kxg3 Qh4+ 21.Kg2 (21.Kf3?? Qh2-+) 21...Nf4+ 22.Kg1 Qg3+ 23.Kh1 Qh3+ 24.Kg1 Qg3+ 25.Kh1=

Alternatively, white could offer a second pawn with 16.Bxf4 Nxf4 17.e5!? b5 18.Nd6 Bxd6 19.exd6 Qxd6 20.g3 Ng6 21.Qf3~/=

16...d6 17.Ne3 Be6?=/+



Black has a number of more ambitious moves, such as 17...Qf6! 18.Nf5 (18.Bb2? Ne5-+) 18...Qxc3 19.Rb1 d5-/+

18.c4?? White could, and should, force things now with 18.g3 Nh3+!? (A solid option is 18...Bxb3 19.axb3 Ne6=/+ when white doesn't appear to have enough compensation for his pawn.) 19.Kg2 Qf6 20.Bxe6 Nhf4+ 21.gxf4 Nxf4+ 22.Kg1 fxe6~/=

18...Rad8-/+ More accurate was 18...Qf6 19.Rb1 Rad8 according to the engines.

19.Bb2? Komodo gives 19.Nf5 Qf6 20.Qd4 Qxd4 21.N3xd4 c5 22.Nb5 Bb8 23.Rd1-/+ but basically, black is just a pawn up.



19...Nh4?? Often it's a problem of putting a rook on the wrong square, but here it is the knight that takes the wrong route, changing the balance of power entirely. Comparisons could be made with the charge of the light brigade!!

19...Ne5!! and black is a pawn up with the better position, e.g. 20.Nf5 Qf6 21.Nxe5 dxe5 22.Qf3 Nd3 23.Re2 Nxb4 24.Ba3 a5-+

20.Nf5!+/- White spots his chance and seizes the initiative back.

20...Bxf5 21.exf5 Nxf3+ 22.Qxf3 Qg5



23.f6!? There were options here, e.g. 23.g3 d5 24.Rad1 dxc4 25.Bxc4+/-

23...g6?+/- The better of two evils was probably to allow 23...Ng6 24.fxg7 Rfe8 25.Rad1 Ne5 26.Qe4 Qxg7+/- The move in the game keeps the kingside closed, but allows the invasion on e7.

24.Re7!



24...Ne6? This sets up some nice tactics for white, but it's now difficult for black to save himself. The best chance seems to be 24...Bb8 25.Rae1 d5 26.cxd5 Nxd5 27.g3 Bd6 28.Rxb7+/- when white has recovered his pawn and retains a big positional plus.

25.Re1! Bb8 26.Bc1+/-



I'm sure white must already have considered the sacrifice on e6, but this is still okay. Although it does give black a chance to make the win more difficult.

26...Qh4?? Here 26...Nd4! was the best try, if still pretty hopeless, 27.Bxg5 Nxf3+ 28.gxf3 hxg5 29.Rxb7+/-

27.Re4! More spectacular would have been 27.R1xe6!!



27...fxe6 28.Rg7+ Kh8 29.Rxg6 Rd7 (29...h5 30.Qe3 with a mating attack.) 30.Rxh6+ Rh7 31.Rxh4 Rxh4 32.f7 and it's time to give up!

27...Qh5 28.Qxh5 gxh5 29.Bxh6 Rfe8 30.R4xe6+-

