

4NCL Rounds 5-8

by IM Andrew Greet

The months of January and March witnessed the completion of rounds 5-8 of the 4NCL. In this report we will catch up with all of the main action from the top division. Before doing so I must humbly admit to a small factual error in my previous 4NCL article. At the end of the game Rajlich-Hebden (1-0) from the Cambridge University 1 – Guildford ADC 1 match, I stated that the result of this game “was predictably not enough to affect the result of the match”, clearly implying that Guildford were victorious. I have since noticed that the match in fact resulted in a 4-4 draw, and thus apologise for the oversight.

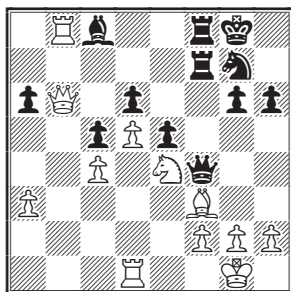
This season the 4NCL website (www.4ncl.co.uk) has featured a series of reports by Grandmaster Nick Pert. Nick’s writing and chess insights are of a predictably high quality, and certain parts of his analysis are quoted in some of the following games. However you can rest assured that you will find plenty of original analysis as well!

Our first batch of games comes from the weekend of 12-13 January, beginning with a clash between two of England’s best known Grandmasters.

Jon Speelman (2491) *White*
Mark Hebden (2530) *Black*

Round 5 The ADs – Guildford ADC 1

We join the action in a tense King’s Indian after White’s 28th move (♙e2-f3). Speelman has made definite inroads on the queenside while Hebden, in traditional King’s Indian fashion, has marshalled his troops in anticipation of a knockout blow on the opposite flank. Now, in this critical position, he faces a tough decision concerning how best to pursue his attack.



28 ... ♗g4?

This natural-looking move is soon refuted by Speelman’s accurate play. Instead Black should have chosen one of two sensible alternatives:

a) 28 ... ♗f5 is very logical, preparing to sink the knight in to d4. A sample variation is 29 ♖b1!? (29 ♗xd6? ♜f6! wins for Black) 29 ... ♗d4 30 ♜xc8 ♜xc8 31 ♗xd6 ♗xf3+ 32 gxf3 ♖xf3 33 ♗xf7 ♖g4+ with a likely perpetual, e.g. 34 ♖h1 ♖f3+ 35 ♖g1 ♖g4+ 36 ♖f1 (36 ♖h1 ♖f3+=) 36 ... ♖xc4+ 37 ♖e1 ♖xf7 38 ♖b7+ ♖f6 39 ♖xc8 ♖e4+ 40 ♖d2 ♖xd5+ 41 ♖c1 ♖c4+ 42 ♖b2 ♖e2+ etc (analysis by Pert).

b) In the above line Black narrowly appears to be able to hold the balance. He may also, however, attempt to seize the initiative with 28 ... ♗f5!, e.g. 29 ♗xd6 ♜xb8 30 ♖xb8+ ♜f8 intending ... e4 with strong counterplay.

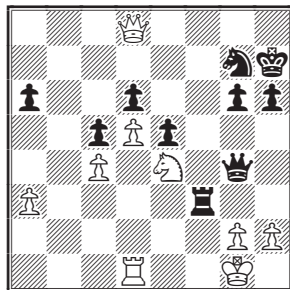
29 ♗xg4 ♖xg4

29 ... ♖xe4? 30 ♗e6 ♗xe6 31 dxe6 ♜xf2 32 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 33 e7 ♜e8 34 ♖d8 is winning for White.

30 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 31 f3!

This temporary pawn sacrifice is the key to White’s play, although accurate follow-up play is essential.

31 ... ♜xf3 32 ♖d8+ ♖h7



33 ♖e1!

This is probably the detail that Hebden missed. The rook calmly defends the knight while sidestepping the diagonal attack from the Black queen.

33 ... ♜f7 34 ♗f6+

Good judgment. The computer actually rates 34 ♖xd6!? as even stronger after 34 ... ♖f4 35 ♖xc5, but in a game between humans Black will retain some practical chances after 35 ... ♗f5. Speelman’s choice was the more pragmatic decision, as the rook will always outrun the knight in a position with pawns scattered across the width of the board.

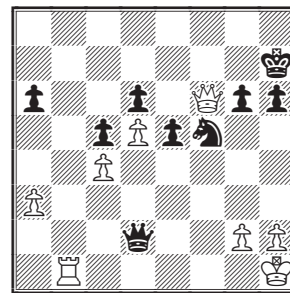
34 ... ♜xf6 35 ♖xf6 ♖d4+ 36 ♖h1 ♖d2

36 ... ♖c3 changes nothing after 37 ♜g1, e.g. 37 ... ♖xc4 38 ♖xd6 ♖d4 39 ♖c1 c4 40 ♖xa6 ♖xd5 41 ♖xc4 etc.

37 ♜g1!

The safest, keeping the rook out of harm’s way and preparing ♖xd6.

37 ... ♗f5 38 ♖b1!



Forcing the knight to retreat.

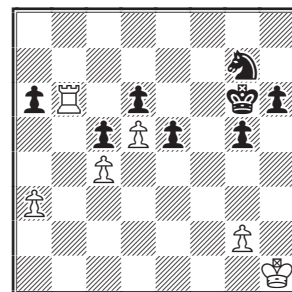
38 ... ♗g7 39 h4!?

39 ♖xd6 was equally decisive.

39 ... g5 40 h5 ♖d3 41 ♖g6+!

The simplest way to win. White sacrifices a pawn, safe in the knowledge that his soon to be passed a-pawn will swiftly decide the game.

41 ... ♖xg6 42 hxg6+ ♖xg6 43 ♜b6



Material is temporarily equal, but in such a position a sluggish knight is no match for a nimble rook. The remaining moves were ...

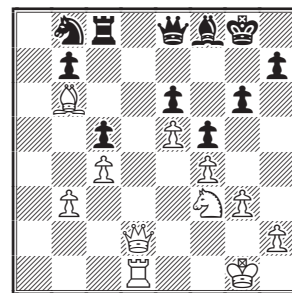
43 ... ♗f5 44 ♜xa6 g4 45 a4 e4 46 a5 e3 47 ♖g1 g3 48 ♖f1 h5 49 ♜a8 ♖f7 50 a6 ♗h4 51 ♜b8 1-0

The following game fragment, taken from the same match, provides a fine lesson in converting a slight plus into a full point.

Nick Pert (2528) *White*
Nigel Davies (2480) *Black*

Round 5 The ADs – Guildford ADC 1

White enjoys a stable advantage on account of his extra space and undisputed control over the open d-file. At the same time Black has no serious weaknesses, and is presently covering all of the important entry points. It is highly instructive to see how Pert sets about increasing the pressure against a solid Grandmaster like Davies.



36 ♔d8!

Heading for an ideal outpost in close proximity to the opposing monarch.

36 ... ♖c6 37 ♙f6 ♗c7 38 ♚g2 h6 39 h4

White might also have considered 39 h3!? followed by a subsequent g4.

39 ... ♖f7

As Pert explains in his annotations, it is hard to find a clear winning plan. Knight moves would permit ... ♖d4 and if his queen or rook vacate the d-file there would follow ... ♗d7.

40 ♗e2!?

White sets a mini-trap.

40 ... ♚g8!

Black successfully avoids the danger, namely 40 ... ♗d7 41 h5! when Pert gives 41 ... g4 42 ♖h4 leading to a slight edge to White, while 42 ♖d4!? also looks interesting.

41 ♗d3

Now ... ♗d7 was threatened.

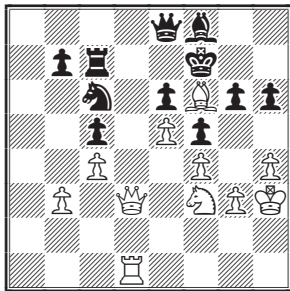
41 ... ♖f7 42 ♔d8 ♗c8

42 ... ♖xd8 43 ♗xd8 ♗xd8 44 ♗xd8 is a pleasant endgame for White, who can centralise his king and then look for a way to infiltrate with the knight.

43 ♙f6

After 43 ♙b6 ♙e7 44 ♗d7?! ♗xd7 45 ♗xd7 ♗b8 the game is equal; there is no time for 46 ♙xc5? as 46 ... ♙e8 wins material.

43 ... ♗c7 44 ♚h3!



A clever move; White does not commit himself in any way, but forces Black to worry about the possibility of g3-g4. This is an ideal strategy in such situations, posing awkward problems without taking any risks yourself.

44 ... h5?!

Preventing any kingside pawn breaks, but the weakening of g5 is a significant concession. Better would have been 44 ... ♚g8, after which 45 g4 fxg4+ 46 ♙xg4 ♖e7 47 ♗d8 ♗c6 48 ♙xe7 ♗xe7 49 ♗d6± is given by Pert. Perhaps earlier White could also consider 47 h5!? g4 48 ♚h3 ♖f5 49 ♖h4 with some pressure. The main point, however, is that by opening the kingside with g3-g4 White has accepted a certain element of risk on account of his king's reduced protection. In the game, on the other hand, Black has relinquished control over an important square without gaining anything in return.

45 ♔d8!?

Now that g5 has been weakened, the bishop transfer to b6 carries considerably more bite. White might also have considered the preliminary 45 ♖g5+ ♚g8 and only now 46 ♔d8. Compare this with some of the variations given below in which Black prefers to answer ♖g5+ with ... ♙xg5.

45 ... ♗c8

Black must avoid 45 ... ♖xd8? 46 ♖g5+! ♚g7 (and not 46 ... ♙e7?? 47 ♗d6 mate) 47 ♗xd8 ♗xd8 48 ♗xd8 winning material. 45 ... ♗xd8 was possible, although 46 ♗xd8 ♖xd8 47 ♗xd8 ♙e7 48 ♗b8 would still leave Black passively placed.

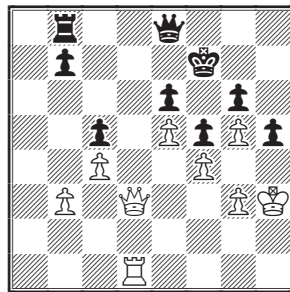
46 ♙b6! ♖b8!

The best defensive chance. 46 ... ♙e7 47 ♖g5+ ♙xg5 48 hxg5 Black will have a hard time covering his weaknesses.

47 ♙a7 ♙e7 48 ♙xb8

Pert decides to head for a pure major piece ending.

48 ... ♗xb8 49 ♖g5+ ♙xg5 50 hxg5



50 ... ♗e7?

This passive move may just be the decisive error. Instead 50 ... b5! looks like the best chance, simplifying the position and activating the Black pieces to the greatest possible extent. True, White can win a pawn with 51 ♗d7+ ♗xd7 52 ♗xd7+ ♙f8 53 ♗c7 bxc4 54 bxc4, but in this case Black should be able to salvage half a point after 54 ... ♗b2 55 ♗xc5 ♗c2 as the White king is completely stranded on h3. Play may continue 56 ♗c7 ♙g8 57 ♗e7 (57 c5 ♙h8 58 c6 ♙g8 59 ♗c8+ ♙g7 60 c7 ♙h7 leaves White nothing better than 61 ♗e8 reaching practically the same position) 57 ... ♗xc4 58 ♗xe6 ♙g7 and Black should draw without too many problems.

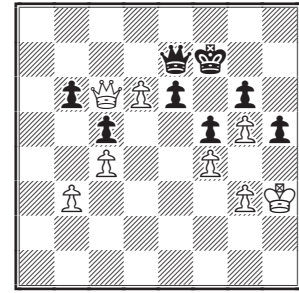
51 ♗d7! b6

Pert gives the variations 51 ... ♗e8 52 ♗b5 ♗d8 53 ♗xd8 ♗xd8 54 ♗xb7+ and 51 ... ♗xd7 52 ♗xd7+ ♙f8 53 ♗h7 ♗d8 54 ♗xb7. In both cases White bags a pawn and obtains excellent winning chances.

52 ♗c6! ♗d8

52 ... ♗b7? allows White to penetrate to the 8th rank with decisive effect with 53 ♗c8 ♙g7 (otherwise ♗h8 will be devastating) 54 ♗d6 and wins.

53 ♗d6! ♗xd6 54 exd6



The mighty passed d-pawn is a major asset, but there is still some work to do.

54 ... ♗d8

From here White has a relatively simple winning plan, as explained by Pert in his annotations. The idea is, at a suitable moment, to place the queen on c7, forcing the reply ... ♙e8 (regardless of whether or not Black is in check). White will then follow with ♗h7, losing the pawn on d6 but capturing the one on g6 (and possibly h5), after which the g-pawn should decide the game. The only possible obstruction to this plan would be if the Black queen could get to a suitable checking position, but White can avoid this easily enough. For the moment he waits while preparing a triangulation with the king.

55 ♙g2!?

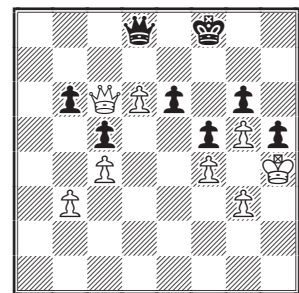
55 ♙h4 would actually be a quicker route to victory, although the text is equally effective in terms of ensuring the point. In his annotations Pert explains that he wished to obtain the position after 55 ... ♙f8 with Black to move, the point being that after 56 ♗c7 the reply 56 ... ♗a8 creates a seemingly awkward mating threat on h1. However it turns out that White can still win easily after 57 ♗e7+ ♙g8 58 ♗xe6+ ♙g7 59 ♗f6+ ♙h7 60 ♗f7+! ♙h8 61 ♗d5!, blocking the mate and preparing to promote the d-pawn, e.g. 61 ... ♗a2 62 ♙h3 when Black can resign.

55 ... ♙f8 56 ♙h2 ♙f7

56 ... ♙g8? 57 ♗c7 ♗a8 58 d7 wins – Pert.

57 ♙h3 ♙f8 58 ♙h4

Now everything is set for the aforementioned winning plan.



58 ... ♗b8?

Allowing a simple finish, although the alternatives would have made no difference to the final outcome:

a) 58 ... ♖g8 loses quickly after 59 d7 (but not 59 ♖c7?? ♖a8! when the tables are turned!) 59 ... ♖f7 60 ♖d6 ♖a8 61 d8=♗+ ♖g8 62 ♖xe6+ ♖h8 63 ♖f6+ ♖g8 64 ♖xg6+ and mate.

b) 58 ... ♖f7 59 ♖c7+ ♖e8 60 ♖g7! ♖xd6 61 ♖xg6+ ♖d7 62 ♖f7+ ♖c6 63 g6 wins easily (analysis by Pert).

59 d7 1-0

Black resigned in view of 59 ... ♖e7 60 ♖c8. An excellent technical performance by Pert.

When selecting games for inclusion in these articles, I generally look for those with entertainment and/or instructive value, especially if they feature one or more well known players. The following clash between youth and experience seemed like an appropriate choice although I would normally prefer not to use three consecutive games from the same match!

David Howell (2528) *White*
Jonathan Mestel (2470) *Black*

Round 5 The ADs – Guildford ADC 1
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 c3 ♗f6 3 e5 ♗d5 4 ♗f3 e6 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 d6 7 ♗c4 ♗c6 8 0-0 ♗e7 9 a3 0-0 10 ♖e1 ♖b6!?

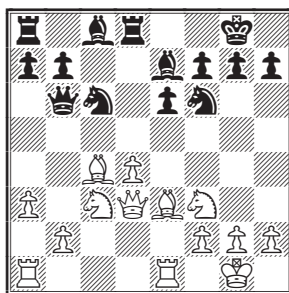
This queen move has been an infrequent guest to tournament practice although it has been used by some very strong players, an example of which can be found in the following note.

11 exd6!?

Angling for an IQP position. The game Kristjansson-McShane, Reykjavik 2003 continued 11 b4 ♗d8 12 ♗d3 dxe5 13 dxe5 g6 14 h4 a5 15 b5 ♗d4 and an eventual Black victory in 44 moves.

11 ... ♗xd6 12 ♖d3 ♗f6 13 ♗e3 ♗d8 14 ♗c3 ♗e7?!

Daring White to advance his d-pawn, but the tactics turn out in White's favour.



15 d5!

A natural move but it needed to be accurately calculated, as after the Black queen moves the d-pawn will be pinned.

15 ... ♖c7 16 ♗b5! ♖b8 17 dxc6! bxc6

17 ... ♗xd3? 18 c7 regains the queen while remaining a piece up.

18 ♗bd4 c5

The knight is pinned, but Howell has foreseen a transition to a winning endgame.

19 ♗c6 ♗xd3 20 ♗xb8

20 ♗xe7+ ♖f8 21 ♗xd3 ♖xe7 22 ♗xc5+ ♖e8 23 ♗e5 may well be good for White, but is unnecessarily speculative.

20 ... ♗xe3 21 ♗xe3 ♗xb8 22 ♗b3

Black certainly has some chances to resist, but in the end White's extra material should be the deciding factor.

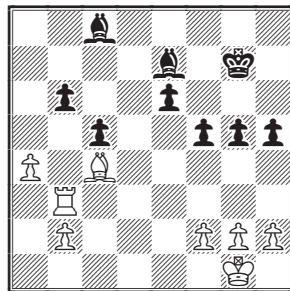
22 ... ♗b6 23 ♗d1 ♗e4?!

This does not help Black's cause. 23 ... ♗b7 would have been the best chance, although White should always be winning in the long run.

24 ♗e5 ♗d6 25 ♗xb6 axb6 26 ♗f1 g5 27 ♗c4 ♗xc4 28 ♗xc4 ♖g7 29 ♗d3 h5 30 a4!

Howell finishes the game in an extremely efficient manner. The text sets up an unstoppable threat.

30 ... f5 31 ♗b3



1-0 Black resigned, as 31 ... ♗d8 is met by 32 a5.

The latter two games helped Guildford to a comfortable match victory. We now turn our attention to a few of the other matches, beginning with a most bizarre incident on board 5 of the Hilsmark Kingfisher-Richmond match from round 5. I should mention that I was seated a few boards away from the relevant game and although I was unable to hear precisely what was said, the general sequence of events was quite clear.

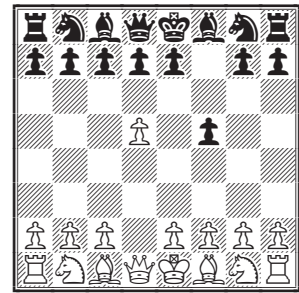
Matthew Broomfield (2349) *White*
Gavin Wall (2305) *Black*

Round 5
Hilsmark Kingfisher 1 – Richmond
Dutch Defence

1 d4 f5

At this moment, with just a single move played by both sides, Matthew accidentally made contact with his d-pawn, perhaps when adjusting the placement of his other pieces on the centre of their respective squares. Gavin jokingly muttered something about the touch-move rule, at which point Matthew – perhaps flustered on hearing this unexpected remark – indeed proceeded to advance his d-pawn for a second time with ...

2 d5?!?



I hardly need state that he was, of course, under no obligation to do so. The touch-move rule only applies when a player touches a piece with the express intention of moving it. In a way both players were at fault here. Despite Gavin's doubtlessly innocent intentions, the 4NCL is a serious, internationally rated competition, and once the clocks have been started the players really ought to know better than to be joking with each other across the board, especially when in close proximity to other games. But ultimately, of course, the responsibility lies with Matthew for making an undesirable move when there was no good reason to do so.

At this point Gavin – perhaps feeling a twinge of guilt over the unintended effect of his previous comment – told Matthew that he was only joking, and generously offered to let him replay the move. Matthew's response was to say, quite correctly and with admirable integrity, that once a legal move has been played and the clock pressed, it is too late to change it.

So what can we say about the early advance of the d-pawn? Well, to begin with it certainly looks more promising than its mirror image of 1 e4 c5 2 e5?, which has very little to recommend it as an anti-Sicilian. While clearly premature, the move does have some redeeming features. It secures White some space in the centre and on the queenside. In fact the same move is often used, albeit at a much later stage, against the Leningrad variation of the Dutch (in which Black plays ... g6).

2 ... ♗f6 3 g3 c6 4 c4

Having already moved his d-pawn twice, White must of course make every attempt to maintain it. If he were forced to exchange it with dxc6 then his opening would rate as an abject failure.

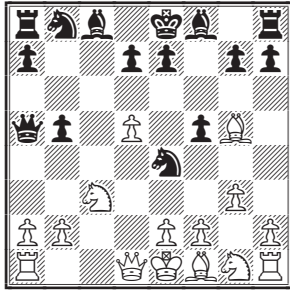
4 ... cxd5 5 cxd5 ♖a5+ 6 ♗c3 b5!?

Wall continues in his quest to undermine the d-pawn. Needless to say, there have been very few practical examples of this position. In Castany Vilaseca-Vila Seuba, Pont de Vilomara 1998 Black played 6 ... e5 and eventually won, although the position at this stage just looks unclear.

7 ♖g5!

With this excellent move White ensures the removal of a key attacker of d5 ♖g2?! b4 would be unsatisfactory after 8 ♖b1 ♖b7 or 8 ♗a4 ♗xa4 9 ♖xa4 ♖b7.

7 ... ♖e4!?



Now the position has turned into a weird kind of Trompowsky-Dutch hybrid. Black could also have tried 7 ... b4 but the position after 8 ♖xf6 exf6 9 ♖b1 ♖b7 10 ♖g2 ♖d6 11 ♖d2 is beginning to look quite nice for White.

8 ♖d2 ♖xd2 9 ♗xd2 b4 10 ♖d1 ♖a6 11 ♖g2 ♖b7 12 ♖h3

12 ♖e3 deserved consideration, the point being to meet 12 ... ♖c5? 13 ♖xf5 ♖b3 with 14 ♖d6+! exd6 15 ♗e3+.

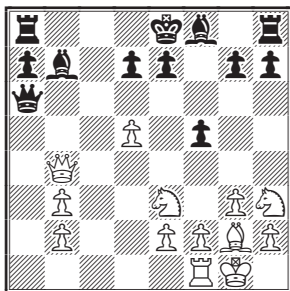
12 ... ♖c5 13 0-0!?

Offering an exchange sacrifice. 13 ♖c1 was the solid choice.

13 ... ♖b3 14 axb3 ♗xa1 15 ♗xb4

15 ♖e3!?

15 ... ♗a6 16 ♖e3



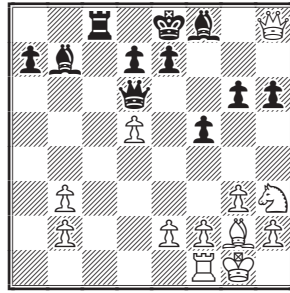
16 ... g6?!

Wall is a long-time devotee of the Leningrad Dutch, and so it is only natural that he would look to develop his bishop on g7 here as well. Nevertheless in this position it looks preferable to gain a tempo against the White queen with 16 ... e5!, e.g. 17 ♗c3 ♗f6 when the pawns are defended and White's compensation looks questionable.

17 ♖c4 ♖c8 18 ♗c3 ♗f6?!

This allows a tactical shot, and on balance the admittedly awkward-looking 18 ... ♖g8 looks better. True, Black's king remains a long way from safety, but on the other hand White's pieces are less than ideally placed to execute an attack. The position is unclear.

19 ♖d6+! ♗xd6 20 ♗xh8 h6



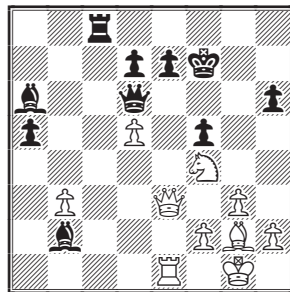
21 ♖f4

A better idea may have been 21 ♗h7!?, hoping to extract full nuisance value from the queen's position. Play may continue 21 ... ♗f6 (21 ... ♖xd5 22 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 23 ♗xg6+ ♗f7 24 ♗a6 leaves Black struggling) 22 ♖f4 ♗f7 (worse is 22 ... g5?! 23 ♖g6) 23 ♗xg6 ♗xg6 24 ♖xg6 ♖c2 (24 ... ♖g7?! 25 ♖h4!) 25 ♖f4 ♖xb2 26 ♖h3! when White remains a pawn up.

21 ... ♖f7 22 ♗d4 a5 23 e4!?

Trying to get open lines towards the Black king.

23 ... ♖g7 24 ♗e3 ♖a6 25 ♖e1 ♖xb2 26 exf5 gxf5



27 ♖f3?!

Now Black takes over the initiative. 27 ♗f3! looks best, intending ♗h5 and ♖h3 when White maintains some pressure.

27 ... ♖f6 28 ♖c1 ♖xc1+ 29 ♗xc1 ♗b4

The two bishops should bring Black a slight edge in the endgame.

30 ♗d1 ♗d4 31 ♗c2 ♗c3 32 ♗d1 ♗a1

With this move Wall offered a draw which was accepted. As I mentioned before, the two bishops should ensure Black of the better chances, so I would guess that some other factor played a role; either Wall was short of time, or perhaps a draw was needed to secure victory in the match (Richmond did indeed prevail by a single victory). In any event, this was certainly an entertaining game and a draw seems like a fair result after the opening peculiarities. 1/2-1/2

Moving on to Sunday's play, the Guildford machine rolled smoothly forward despite suffering a few

individual casualties, including the following superb effort by Stephen Gordon of Hilsmark Kingfisher.

Stephen Gordon (2501) White
David Howell (2528) Black
Round 6 Hilsmark Kingfisher 1 –
Guildford ADC 2
Grunfeld Defence

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 d5

David has been utilising the Grunfeld with success for many years now.

4 cxd5 ♖xd5 5 e4 ♖xc3 6 bxc3 ♖g7 7 ♖c4

Stephen is not afraid of a theoretical challenge and heads straight for one of the most critical main lines.

7 ... c5 8 ♖e2 ♖c6 9 ♖e3 0-0 10 0-0 ♖d7!?

Several Grunfeld specialists have recently been turning to the text instead of the intensely theoretical 10 ... ♖g4 11 f3 ♖a5 12 ♖d3 (12 ♖xf7+ is another option) 12 ... cxd4 13 cxd4 ♖e6 14 d5 (or 14 ♖c1) 14 ... ♖xa1 15 ♗xa1 f6 which has been analysed well beyond move 30 in some variations.

11 ♖b1 ♗c7

11 ... a6 has been the most popular move, but nowadays both 12 dxc5 and 12 d5 are considered promising for White.

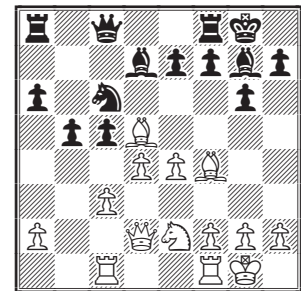
12 ♖f4 ♗c8

Black does not mind losing a tempo, as White's 'free' move has reduced his control over the crucial d4-square.

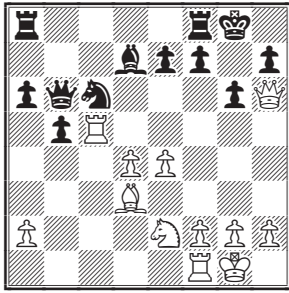
13 ♖c1!

It makes good sense to place the rook opposite the enemy queen.

13 ... a6 14 ♗d2 b5 15 ♖d5!?



This seems to be new. 15 ♖d3 has been seen in a few other games, most notably the high class encounter Van Wely-Svidler, Wijk aan Zee 2007 I will quote the rest of this game for its instructive and entertainment value, and in any case it will not take up too much space! Play continued 15 ... ♗b7 16 ♖h6 ♖xh6! (Very risky! Instead 16 ... ♗b6 has also been tested, while Van Wely mentions the line 16 ... cxd4 17 ♖xg7 ♖xg7 18 cxd4 with a slight advantage) 17 ♗xh6 cxd4 18 cxd4 ♗b6? (18 ... ♗a7 keeps Black alive) 19 ♖c5!



(analysis diagram: Van Wely-Svidler)

19 ... ♖g4 (19 ... ♗xd4 20 ♜h5! shows why the queen should not have come to b6) 20 ♗f4 ♗xd4 21 ♜g5 ♖f3 (21 ... ♗d7 22 ♜h5 wins) 22 ♜g3! 1-0.

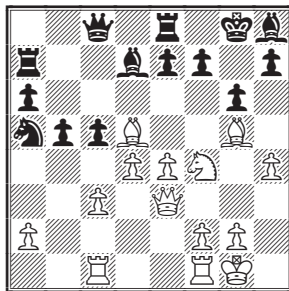
15 ... ♜d8

Presumably Stephen's idea was that 15 ... e6 16 ♖b3 would leave Black weaker on d6 and f6.

16 ♖h6 ♖h8

Naturally Howell wishes to preserve his best piece.

17 ♖g5 ♜a7 18 ♜e3 ♜e8 19 h4!? ♗a5 20 ♗f4

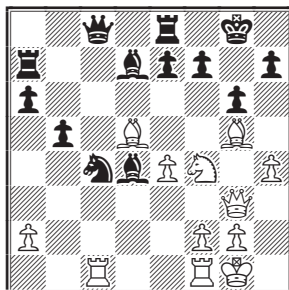


White is massing his forces in preparation for a full scale kingside onslaught.

20 ... e6

This weakens f6, although David's decision to expel the irritating bishop was a fully understandable one. This is a good moment for us to explore some other options, a few examples being:

a) 20 ... ♗c4 should be met by 21 ♜g3! (21 ♖xc4 bxc4 is less dangerous; White should retain the bishop for its attacking power), when White's considerable attacking potential can be seen in the following sample variation: 21 ... cxd4 22 cxd4 ♖xd4



(analysis diagram)

23 ♗xg6! (23 h5 is dangerous, but the text is even better) 23 ... hxg6 24 ♖e3! ♖xe3 25 ♜xg6+ ♗h8 26 ♜h5+ ♗g7 27 ♜xf7+ ♗h6 (27 ... ♗h8? 28 ♜h5+ ♗g7 29 fxe3 wins easily) 28 fxe3 with a very dangerous attack.

b) 20 ... ♖g7!? deserved attention, intending to meet 21 h5? with the cold-blooded 21 ... e6 22 ♖b3 h6 23 hxg6 fxg6 when it is doubtful that White will obtain enough for the soon to be missing piece.

21 ♖b3 f6

Not an ideal move to make, but Black was in danger of suffocating on the kingside with ideas like e4-e5 and perhaps ♗f4-h5!? on the way.

22 ♖h6 ♜c7 23 e5!

With this energetic move the White pieces really spring to life. Any 1 d4 players looking for a lesson in how to conduct a kingside attack against the Grunfeld are advised to pay close attention to Gordon's expert handling of the position.

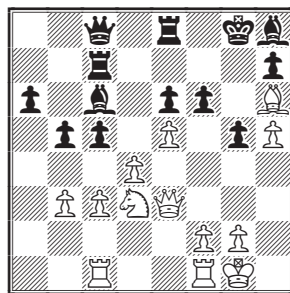
23 ... ♗xb3

Howell decides to eliminate a powerful attacking piece; an understandable decision, although now he will have to worry about the dark squares. 23 ... fxe5 24 dxe5 ♗c6 25 h5 ♗xe5 26 ♜g3 would leave his kingside looking decidedly shaky.

24 axb3 ♖c6 25 h5!

Perfect timing!

25 ... g5 26 ♗d3



Black's once solid kingside is on the verge of ruin, meanwhile the White knight is headed for a juicy outpost on the opposite flank.

26 ... c4 27 bxc4 bxc4 28 ♗c5

28 ♗b4!? was also tempting, e.g. 28 ... ♖b7 29 ♜g3! a5 30 ♗c2 intending ♗e3-g4 or simply f2-f4 with a huge attack.

28 ... ♜a8?

This is a clear error although the position was already highly problematic. The text pointlessly decentralises the queen, for the sake of a one-move threat which is easily parried. 28 ... fxe5!? may have been the last chance, e.g. 29 ♜xg5+ ♖g7 30 dxe5 ♜f8 when Black is clearly worse but still fighting.

29 f3

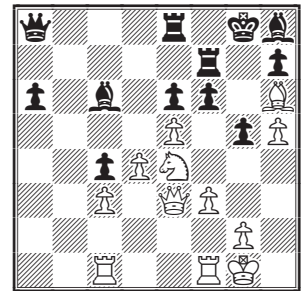
This does not spoil anything, although the defensive move was

probably not even necessary and White could have won even more convincingly with 29 ♜fe1!, e.g. 29 ... ♖g2 30 exf6 ♖xf6 31 ♜g3 ♖h1 32 ♜xe6 with a huge attack.

29 ... ♜f7?!

29 ... ♜d8 was essential, although even here White could settle for the simple 30 ♗xa6, bagging a pawn while maintaining all of his kingside trumps.

30 ♗e4!



30 ... ♖xe4

This is hopeless, but there was no satisfactory answer to the threats of 31 ♗d6 and 31 ♗xf6+.

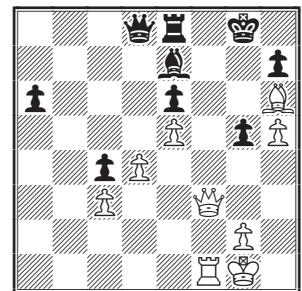
31 fxe4 ♜d8

There now follows a simple series of exchanges leading to Black's swift demise.

32 exf6 ♖xf6

32 ... ♜xf6 is no good in view of 33 ♜xg5+.

33 e5 ♖e7 34 ♜xf7 ♗xf7 35 ♜f1+ ♗g8 36 ♜f3



Material is still equal, but Black's kingside is hopelessly exposed and the game is soon over.

36 ... ♗h8 37 ♜f7 ♜g8 38 ♜xe6 g4 39 ♜f7 1-0

With that fine performance we conclude our coverage of January's proceedings and immediately fast-forward six weeks to the beginning of March for rounds 7 and 8. In another well written report on the 4NCL website, Nick Pert notes an unusually high number of blunders from the weekend's play, including (but by no means limited to!) the following three, conveniently arranged in ascending order of magnitude.

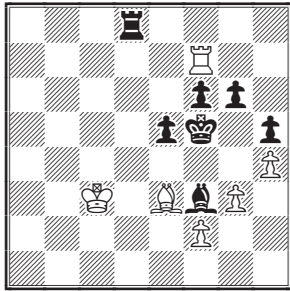
First we have an elementary tactical oversight from a legendary grandmaster, although in all probability

it seems unlikely that it would have affected the final result of the game.

Gawain Jones (2562) *White*
Jon Speelman (2491) *Black*

Round 7 Slough Sharks 1 – The ADs

We join the game after White's 37th move (♙c7-f7). The odds are on a draw although Black can certainly press for a win without taking any risk. Or can he?



Pert suggests 37 ... ♜d6 here, although Speelman may have rejected that in view of 38 ♙g5 when Black's king and rook will both be tied to an awkward defence of the f6-pawn. Instead 37 ... ♜c8+! looks best, followed by ... ♙d5 to oust the rook from its active post on f7. In that case White would have to suffer to make a draw. Unfortunately for Speelman, he instead opted for the immediate ...

37 ... ♙d5?

... presenting Gawain with a simple route to a handshake with ...

38 ♜xf6+! ½-½

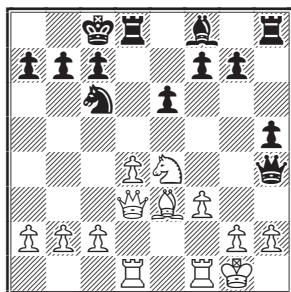
This was doubtlessly a point of frustration for Speelman, although the chances are that Gawain would eventually have been able to hold the draw in any case. The following example features something far more drastic.

Oliver Cooley (2106) *White*
Nigel Povah (2334) *Black*

Round 7 Cambridge University 1 –
Guildford ADC 2

Centre Counter Defence

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♗f6 3 d4 ♙g4 4 ♙e2 ♙xe2 5 ♗xe2 ♜xd5 6 0-0 ♗c6 7 ♗bc3 ♜f5 8 ♙e3 e6 9 ♗g3 ♜g6 10 ♜e2 0-0-0 11 ♜ad1 h5 12 ♜d3 ♜g4 13 f3 ♜h4 14 ♗ge4 ♗xe4 15 ♗xe4



On a normal day Povah would have played 15 ... ♙d6 with an approximately equal position. On this occasion, however, he opted for ...

15 ... ♜f3??

... leading to the immediate loss of the queen after ...

16 ♙g5!

Black may have mentally dismissed this in view of 16 ... ♜xe4, although one can quickly ascertain that after 17 ♜e3 his situation is hopeless. Instead he tried

16 ... ♜xd4

...but was soon forced to resign after...

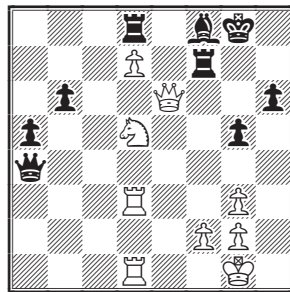
17 ♜b3 ♜xd1 18 ♜xd1 ♗d4 19 ♙xh4 ♜xe4 20 ♜xd4 ♙c5 21 ♜xe6+ ♙b8 22 ♜xe4 1-0

Yes, these things really can happen to IMs. Perhaps the one point of consolation could be that in such a position all three results are possible. And maybe, just maybe, if Black had played a better 15th move then it might equally have led to a particular chain of events which, against that particular opponent at that particular place on that particular day, could have ultimately led to the same outcome. Unfortunately in our next example the outcome of the game was practically a foregone conclusion ... or so it seemed.

Donny Muter (2232) *White*

Daniel Lindner (2237) *Black*

Round 8 (Slough Sharks 1 – Hilsmark Kingfisher 1)



White's skilful middlegame play has yielded an overwhelming advantage and Daniel, playing Black, must have almost been on the verge of resigning. There are many ways to win, the simplest being 39 ♗f6+ ♙g7 40 ♗g4 or 40 ♗h5+ ♙g8 41 ♜g6+ ♙g7 42 ♜e1, e.g. 42 ... ♜xd7 43 ♜e8+ ♜f8 44 ♗f6+ ♙h8 45 ♜h7 mate. Unfortunately for Donny he now produced the unthinkable ...

39 ♜f3??

I can only imagine that White was desperately short of time.

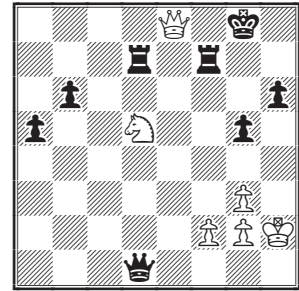
39 ... ♜xd1+ 40 ♙h2 ♜dxd7 41 ♗f6+

White's position was so good that even now he almost has enough play to secure a perpetual. Alas, this was not to be Muter's day and the other options also turn out to be insufficient:

a) 41 ♜xf7 works well after 41 ... ♜xf7?? 42 ♗f6+ ♙g7 43 ♗e8+

♙g8 44 ♗f6+ with a perpetual, but 41 ... ♜h5+! 42 ♙g1 ♜xf7 secures the win, e.g. 43 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 44 ♗f6+ ♙g7 45 ♗xd7 a4 when the a-pawn races to promotion.

b) 41 ♜g6+ ♜g7 42 ♜xf8+ ♙xf8 43 ♜f6+ ♙g8 44 ♜e6+ ♜g7 (but not 44 ... ♜df7?? 45 ♗f6+ when Black will be mated!) 45 ♜e8+



(analysis diagram)

45 ... ♜f8! (Black can afford to return one rook! Other moves would not enable him to escape the checks. 46 ♜xd7 ♜h5+ 47 ♙g1 ♜f7 and wins.

41 ... ♙g7

Now there is nothing for White, and after a few more desperate checks he is forced to resign.

42 ♗e8+ ♙h8 43 ♜e5+ ♙g8 44 ♗f6+ ♜xf6 45 ♜xf6 ♜d6 0-1

To make matters worse, the match ended in a 4-4 draw. As the saying goes, it never rains but it pours ...

Moving on to the blunder-free zone, the following miniature featured a well played attack and a very attractive finish.

Edward Dearing (2381) *White*
Alexander Cherniaev (2491) *Black*

Round 7 Cambridge University 1 –
Guildford ADC 2

Chigorin Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 ♗c6

The Russian Grandmaster appears to have added the Chigorin to his repertoire very recently, having used it in a single outing just a few months prior to the present game. His opening preparation is usually first rate, but on the evidence of this game it would seem that he still has some work to do.

3 ♗f3 ♙g4 4 ♗c3 e6 5 ♙f4

The aforementioned game A.Pashikian-A.Cherniaev, Moscow 2008 had seen 5 ♜a4 ♙xf3 6 gxf3 ♗ge7 and a draw in 32 moves.

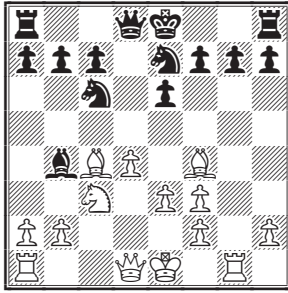
5 ... ♙xf3

Black can also delay this exchange with 5 ... ♙b4 e3 ♗f6 or 6 ... ♗ge7.

6 gxf3 dxc4 7 e3 ♙b4?!

The bishop is misplaced here. The more common 7 ... ♙d6 would have been better, challenging the White bishop and supporting a future ... e6-e5 break.

8 e3 ♗ge7 9 ♜g1



9 ... ♖g6

If Black is looking for a way to justify his 7th then 9 ... ♗d5! may be worth a try, e.g. 10 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 11 ♖xg7 0-0-0 when Black may be able to claim some compensation, although whether it is really sufficient is quite another matter.

10 ♗g3 ♖e7

Perhaps Black is going to castle long?

11 ♖c2 0-0

No, he decides to go to the kingside after all. The decision is not an easy one, as the king is unlikely to feel completely safe on either flank.

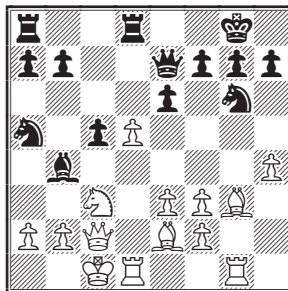
12 0-0-0 ♗fd8 13 h4!

Dearing wastes no time in commencing his attack.

13 ... ♗a5?!

The coming flank demonstration proves to be woefully ineffective. Black should have preferred a prophylactic move such as 13 ... ♖h8 or the re-centralising 13 ... ♗d6, e.g. 14 h5 ♗h4!?, although it must be said that his position would remain clearly worse in both cases.

14 ♗e2 c5 15 d5!



15 ... c4

15 ... exd5? would only assist with the activation of White's knight.

16 h5 ♗f8 17 ♗d4!

This turret will soon bear down heavily upon the enemy's flimsy fortress.

17 ... f6 18 ♗h4!

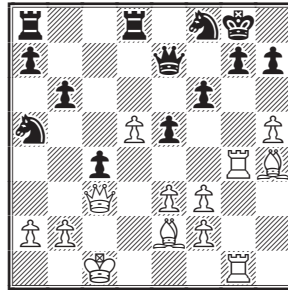
Recruiting another attacking piece while also clearing the g-file for the rampaging rooks.

18 ... ♗xc3

Equally depressing were 18 ... ♗ac8 19 ♗dg4, or 18 ... ♗d7 19 ♗e4 ♖h8 20 ♗xg7 (or 20 h6 g5 21 ♗xg5). Finally, in case of 18 ... ♖h8 (Pert) there follows 19 ♗dg4 exd5 20 ♗xg7 ♖xg7 21 ♗xg7 ♖xg7 22 h6+ ♖f7 23 ♖f5 ♗xc3 (or 23 ... ♗d6 24 ♗xd5) 24 bxc3 ♗d6 25 ♗g3 when Black will not survive for long.

19 ♖xc3 e5 20 ♗dg4 b6

How would you continue as White?



21 ♖xe5! 1-0

A beautiful way to end the game, although it should be noted that the equally attractive 21 ♖b4! or the more prosaic 21 f4! were equally devastating. Black resigned, as 21 ... fxe5 22 ♗xe7 leads to heavy material gains and 21 ... ♖xe5 22 ♗xg7+ ♖h8 23 ♗g8 is mate.

The following clash between two of England's brightest prospects provided one of the most interesting games of the weekend.

Stephen Gordon (2501) White

Gawain Jones (2562) Black

Round 8 Hillsmark Kingfisher 1 –

Slough Sharks 1

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♗f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♗c6 8 d5 ♗e7

This classic King's Indian tabiya has been seen in thousands of games.

9 b4 c6!?

An interesting alternative to the much more common 9 ... ♗h5.

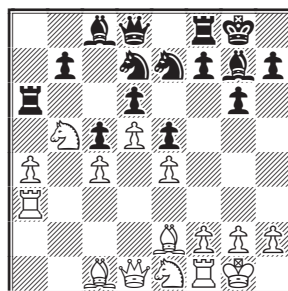
10 a4

10 ♖b1 is a valid alternative, as is 10 dxc6!?

10 ... a5 11 bxa5 c5!

Although Black has technically wasted a tempo, he has succeeded in blocking the queenside.

12 ♗a3 ♗xa5 13 ♗e1 ♗d7 14 ♗b5 ♗a6



15 ♗g5?!

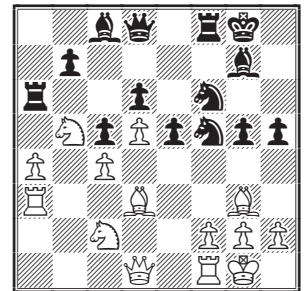
A novelty, but probably not a good one as the bishop ends up being a target on the kingside. Instead the game L'Huillier-Szabo, St Lorrain 2003 saw

15 ♗c2 f5 16 ♗g5?! ♗f6 17 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 with easy play for Black. Compared with a standard King's Indian, it seems to me that White is unlikely to be able to achieve much on the queenside. Thus it seems logical for him to try and contest the centre and perhaps even the kingside. To this end, 15 ♗d3 f5 16 exf5! ♗xf5 17 f4 or even the immediate 15 f4! deserved serious consideration. These ideas make especially good sense when you look at the Black rook on a6. It is ideally placed for blocking the a-pawn and defending d6, but will have a hard time reaching the opposite flank. Compare the White rook on a3, which enjoys the freedom of the entire third rank.

15 ... f6 16 ♗h4?!

It may have been better to admit the error and return to somewhere like d2.

16 ... g5! 17 ♗g3 f5 18 exf5 ♗xf5 19 ♗c2 ♗f6 20 ♗d3 h5!



Now we see the drawback of White's bishop manoeuvre. Not only is this piece doing very little to enhance White's active prospects, it also presents a clear target for the advancing Black pawns.

21 f3 ♗xg3 22 hxg3 h4

22 ... g4 was also possible; it is hard to say which move is better.

23 f4?

Very creative, but objectively it can hardly be good to open the position for the Black bishops. 23 g4 looks better. Stephen was probably afraid of 23 ... e4, but the position after the forcing sequence 24 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 25 fxe4 ♗xf1+ 26 ♖xf1 ♗xg4 27 ♗e3 ♗d7 28 ♗f5 ♗e5 looks about equal.

23 ... gxf4 24 gxf4 h3

24 ... ♗g4 25 fxe5 ♗xe5 also looks tempting.

25 fxe5 h2+?

The start of a dubious plan. 25 ... dxe5! would have left Black clearly better.

26 ♗h1 ♗g4?!

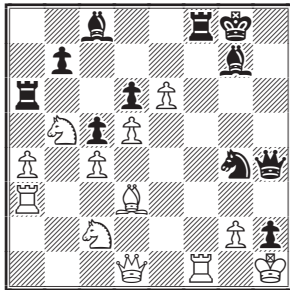
Jones gambles everything on a risky kingside assault, but his position is not strong enough to justify such an ambitious strategy. Objectively best would still have been 26 ... dxe5 27 ♗e3 e4 with an unclear position, although of course if Black wished to play like this then he would have been far better off capturing on e5 on the previous move.

27 e6!

Establishing a mighty passed pawn while also burying the c8-bishop. White has a winning position as long as he can avoid being mated on the kingside.

27 ... ♖h4

How should White continue?



28 ♕f5

This is a sensible move, but take ten bonus points if you spotted 28 ♕h7+!! when Black can choose between three moves, none of which come close to solving his problems:

a) 28 ... ♖xh7 29 ♖xf8+ followed by ♖xg4 (+) is hopeless for Black.

b) 28 ... ♗h8 29 ♕f5! is similar to the game except that Black faces the massive additional worry of ♖h3, winning the queen.

c) 28 ... ♗xh7 29 ♖h3 wins the queen, and after 29 ... ♖xh3 30 gxh3 ♗f2+ 31 ♖xf2 ♖xf2 32 ♖h5+ ♗g8 (or 32 ... ♕h6 33 ♖h4) 33 e7 ♕d7 34 e8=♖+ ♕xe8 35 ♖xe8+ ♗h7 36 ♖e7 Black can resign.

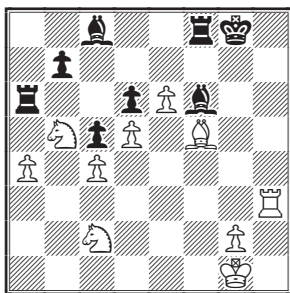
28 ... ♗f2+ 29 ♖xf2 ♖xf2 30 ♖f3 ♖g1+

30 ... ♖h4 31 ♖h3 does not help Black.

31 ♖xg1 hxg1=♖+ 32 ♗xg1 ♕f6 33 ♖g3+ ♗h8 35 ♖h3+ ♗g8 35 ♖g3+

Repeating moves to gain time on the clock.

35 ... ♗h8 36 ♖h3+ ♗g8



37 ♖h7?!

The rook is unstable here. Instead it was time to activate another piece with 37 ♗e3! ♕d4 (the main threat was ♕h7+ followed by ♗f5) 38 ♖g3+ ♗h8 39 e7 ♖e8 40 ♕xc8 ♖xc8 41 ♗c7 and wins (Pert).

37 ... ♕g7 38 ♕d3 ♖xa4 39 ♗xd6?!

Again White misses a golden opportunity to press for a victory, this time with 39 e7!. Play continues 39 ... ♖e8 40 ♗xd6 ♖xe7 41 ♗xc8 ♕d4+ (no better is 41 ... ♖c7 42 ♗d6)

42 ♗xd4 ♖xh7 43 ♕xh7+ ♗xh7 44 d6 ♖xc4 45 ♗b3 ♖c3 46 d7 ♖d3 47 ♗xc5 winning easily. Probably time trouble was a factor, as the game has been extremely complicated for many moves now.

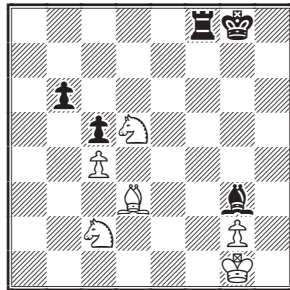
39 ... ♖a6 40 ♗b5?!

40 ♗xc8 ♖xc8 41 g4 (Pert) looks preferable.

40 ... ♕xe6!

Can this move really be called a 'sacrifice' when we consider the potency of the pawn duo in question?

41 dxe6 ♖xe6 42 ♖h5 b6 43 ♗c7 ♖e5 44 ♖xe5 ♕xe5 45 ♗d5 ♕g3



46 ♗e7+?!

The knight was ideally placed on d5, so it seems illogical to move it. 46 ♕f5! looks like the last realistic winning attempt, blocking the f-file and taking advantage of the bishop's indirect protection courtesy of the potential knight fork on e7. Play may continue 46 ... ♗g7 (or 46 ... ♖a8 47 ♗f1) 47 ♗ce3 ♕e5 48 ♗f2 ♕d4 49 g4 when Black faces a difficult defence.

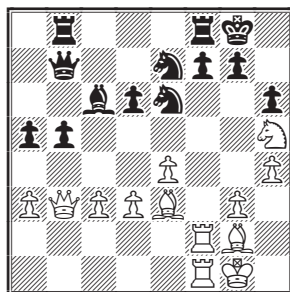
46 ... ♗f7 47 ♗f5 ♖d8 48 ♗xg3 1/2-1/2

A draw was agreed here, in view of something like 48 ... ♖xd3 49 ♗f5 ♗e6 50 ♗ce3 b5 51 cxb5 ♖b3.

We finish with a simple yet attractive combination, taken from the match between the two top championship contenders.

**Tony Kosten (2511) White
Lorin D'Costa (2406) Black
Round 7 Guildford ADC 1 –
Barbican 1**

We join the game after 22 moves of an English Opening. Early in the opening Black exchanged bishop for knight on c3, but will soon face serious repercussions on the dark squares.



23 ♕h3

Recruiting another attacking piece. 23 ♖xf7!? ♖xf7 24 ♖xe6 ♖bf8 also looks tempting for White after 25 ♗xg7!, although Black may have some chances to hold the ending after 25 ... ♖d7.

23 ... ♕d7 24 ♖d1

Once again 24 ♖xf7 was a strong alternative: 24 ... ♖xf7 25 ♕xe6 ♕xe6 26 ♖xe6 ♖bf8 27 ♗xg7 ♖c8 28 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 29 ♖xc8+ ♗xc8 30 ♗f5 forces the win of a third pawn for the exchange, as 30 ... h5? 31 ♗h6+ is no good for Black.

24 ... ♗g6 25 ♕f5 ♗c5?

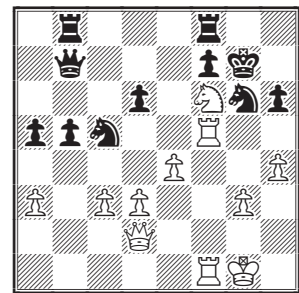
Under pressure, Black commits the fatal error. Still, it was far from easy to find a satisfactory defence against the plan of ♖d2 followed by a sacrifice on h6 or g7.

26 ♕xh6!

Also decisive was 26 ♗xg7! ♗xg7 27 ♖h5.

26 ... gxf6 27 ♖d2 ♕xf5 28 ♖xf5 ♗h7 29 ♗f6+ ♗g7

Kosten now concludes the game with an elementary, though still very pretty combination.



30 ♖xb6+! 1-0

Black resigned in view of 30 ... ♗xh6 31 ♖h5+ ♗g7 32 ♖h7 mate.

Guildford won this match convincingly, and now look certain to obtain their second consecutive title. Second place is likely to be decided by Barbican 1's clash with Guildford 2 over the final weekend. Finally, it is worth mentioning that no teams will be relegated from either of the top two divisions this season. This is due to a restructuring that will see both divisions expanded to include 15 teams, although as far as this writer is aware the number of matches will remain at 11.

4NCL Division 1 Match/Game Pts

Guildford-ADC 1	15 (46½)
Guildford-ADC 2	14 (41)
Barbican 1	13 (41½)
Betsson.com	13 (39)
The ADs	10 (36½)
Hilsmark Kingfisher	7 (33)
Wood Green	6 (30½)
Richmond	6 (30)
Barbican 2	5 (25)
Cambridge University 1	4 (23½)
North West Eagles	2 (19)
Slough Sharks 1	1 (18½)