

4NCL Final Weekend

by *IM Andrew Greet*

As expected, the reigning Champions Guildford-ADC romped home to their second consecutive 1-2 finish in May, their first team dropping a mere three out of twenty four game points over their final three matches. Congratulations to manager Nigel Povah and the rest of the team on another dominant season.

Tony Kosten was one of three Guildford grandmasters to obtain a perfect 3/3 over the final bank holiday weekend. Amazingly his Saturday and Sunday games averaged just seventeen moves apiece! We kick things off with his round 9 miniature against Chris Dorrington of Barbican 2.

Chris Dorrington (2248) White

Tony Kosten (2511) Black

Round 9, Barbican 2 – Guildford 2
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 ♘d2 ♖f6 4 ♗gf3 ♘c6 5 c3 e5 6 exd5?!

This exchange only facilitates Black's development. 6 b4 or 6 ♙e2 should have been preferred. White's set-up may not appear too threatening, but he is actually playing a Philidor with two extra tempi although this is no guarantee of an advantage.

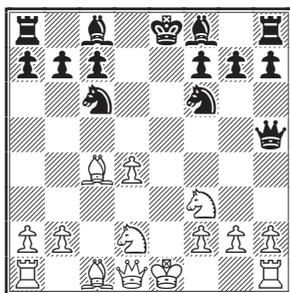
6 ... ♗xd5!

This capture makes perfect sense as there is no tempo-gaining ♘c3 available for White.

7 d4!?

Dorrington is determined to utilise the position of the Black queen to gain a tempo for development.

7 ... exd4 8 ♙c4 ♗h5! 9 cxd4



9 ... ♙e6

Kosten shows excellent judgment by refusing to worry excessively about his pawn structure. The strategy works to perfection here although it must be said that 9 ... ♙d6 would also have given Black a very comfortable game.

Before moving on it is worth taking a moment to reflect on the subject of

pawn structure and how it fits into a grandmaster's evaluative processes. In the present position Kosten's number one priority is to exchange White's active bishop while preparing long castling followed by activating his remaining pieces as quickly as possible. Imagine for a moment that you were playing Black in this position. Would you have seriously considered Kosten's move, or would you have instinctively filtered it out of your thoughts on the basis that you would be saddled with an isolated e-pawn? Be honest!

As one who regularly coaches players of club and county level, I have encountered this theme time and time with students. It seems that even quite experienced players will often reject what they can see is a strong continuation purely on the basis that it will result in some minor damage to their structure. So for all improving players who are reading this, be sure to remember: The interests of your pieces come before those of the pawns!

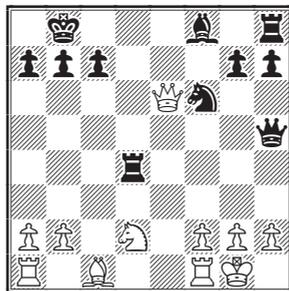
10 ♙xe6 fxe6 11 ♗b3?

White is unable to resist the temptation to attack the weakness, but he would have been better off focusing on development with 11 0-0 0-0-0 12 ♘c4 when he has reasonable chances to equalise.

11 ... 0-0-0 12 ♗xe6+

White is more or less committed, as 12 0-0 ♘xd4 13 ♘xd4 ♗xd4 14 ♘f3 ♗d5 would just leave him a pawn down.

12 ... ♖b8 13 0-0 ♘xd4 14 ♘xd4 ♗xd4



Material is level, but with ... ♙d6 or ... ♙c5 followed by ... ♗e8 on the way Black obviously has the makings of a strong initiative. Perhaps rattled by the unfavourable result of the opening White now self-destructs.

15 ♗e1?? ♖b4!

Oops! Actually White's last seems to be a 'double blunder' as 15 ... ♙d6 would also have won thanks to the dual threats of ... ♗xh2+ and ... ♗e8

16 ♘f3 ♗e8 0-1

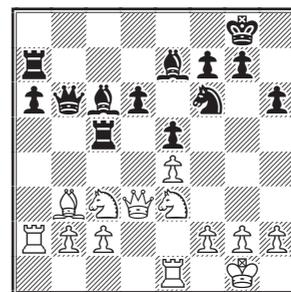
To provide a semblance of balance, the following game features a rare Guildford defeat courtesy of Betsson's Harriet Hunt.

Joe Gallagher (2487) White

Harriet Hunt (2457) Black

Round 9, Guildford 1 – Betsson

We join the game after White's 24th move (24 ♗a1-a2). At present White is maintaining a grip over the central light squares, and given another move he will more than likely sink a knight into d5 when it will be very hard for Black to do anything active. Hunt decides that drastic measures are called for.



24 ... ♗xc3! 25 ♗xc3 ♘xe4

For a small material investment Black has succeeded in liberating her pieces.

26 ♗c4?

As so often happens, a sharp change in the course of the game is immediately followed by a serious error. White could still have maintained some advantage with 26 ♗a5! which would probably have forced a queen exchange, as if Black retreats then 27 ♘d5 or 27 ♙d5 could prove irritating. Does that mean that Harriet was wrong to sacrifice the exchange? Absolutely not, for two reasons.

Firstly, I suspect that most strong players would prefer an endgame with a slight material deficit but reasonably active pieces over a passive position with few prospects for counterplay.

Secondly chess is largely a game of psychology, and Black's 24th may well have had a profound effect on the opponent's psychological balance as evidenced by the game continuation. One could make the argument that, even if a particular move was theoretically the worst idea on the board (this is certainly not the case with 24 ... ♗xc3, but I'm just making the point), if for whatever reason the sight of that move causes the opponent to react in such a way as to render the final result of the game more favourable to

us than it would otherwise have been, then the move in question can by definition be regarded as the correct choice against that particular opponent at that particular time.

26 ... ♖h4!

This move, which had almost certainly been missed by White, enables Hunt to generate a very strong initiative.

27 g3 ♖g5!

This knight is destined to become Black's star piece!

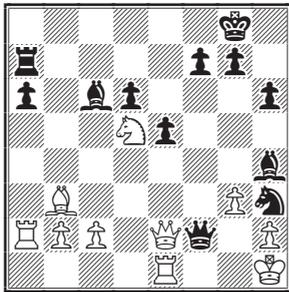
28 ♖d5

28 gxh4?? would cost White his queen after 28 ... ♖h3+ 29 ♖f1 ♖b5.

28 ... ♖h3+ 29 ♖h1

Not 29 ♖g2?? ♖xf2+ 30 ♖xh3 ♖d7+ 31 g4 ♖f3+ 32 ♖xh4 g5+ 33 ♖h5 ♖h3 mate.

29 ... ♖xf2 30 ♖e2



30 ... ♖c5

Another strong continuation would have been 30 ... ♖xg3 31 hxg3 ♖xg3 32 ♖f1 ♖f4 33 ♖xf4 ♖xf4 with four pawns for a piece. Instead Hunt prefers to avoid simplifications and maintain the pressure.

31 c4

This must have been a difficult decision. True, the knight on d5 will benefit from the added protection, but the bishop's position becomes much less stable and the d4-square becomes a potential outpost for the Black pieces.

31 ... ♖b7 32 ♖a3 ♖d8! 33 ♖g2 ♖g5

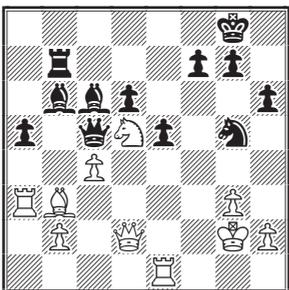
The knight has done its work on the kingside so now it returns to the centre.

34 ♖f2? ♖b6?!

This does not spoil anything, but Black could have put the game beyond any doubt with 34 ... ♖xd5+! 35 cxd5 ♖xf2+ 36 ♖xf2 ♖b6+ followed by ... ♖c5.

35 ♖d2 a5!

Calmly dealing with the threat to the a-pawn while hinting at the possibility of a timely ... a4 followed by ... ♖a5.



36 h4?!

White's position was already becoming desperate, but this certainly does not help as now the knight will come to an even better location.

36 ... ♖e6 37 ♖h3 ♖d8 38 ♖e3

38 ♖a4 looks like the best chance, exchanging one of Black's best pieces.

38 ... ♖d4

Earlier I said that this knight would become Black's star piece, and its triumphant arrival on this wonderful square signals the end of White's resistance.

39 ♖a2?

A final blunder in a hopeless position.

0-1

According to the game score White resigned here without waiting for 39 ... ♖xb2 when Black wins easily.

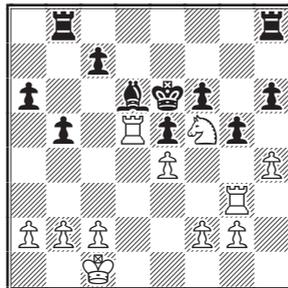
Although it would have come as scant consolation for Gallagher, Stuart Conquest exacted revenge for Guildford by defeating Harriet the following day. Conquest went on to join Kosten in the 3/3 club for the weekend, alongside fellow grandmaster Mark Hebden who benefited from an oversight by Andrew Ledger on the Sunday to apply a picturesque mating net.

Mark Hebden (2530) White

Andrew Ledger (2424) Black

Round 10, Guildford 1 – Betsson

Black is under some pressure, but he could have rendered White's task quite problematic with 23 ... ♖bd8 intending ... c6.



Instead he preferred ...

23 ... gxh4??

... no doubt expecting 24 ♖xh4 followed by 24 ... ♖hg8 or 24 ... ♖bg8 with reasonable defensive chances. Unfortunately for Ledger a nasty surprise awaited him.

24 ♖g7!

Threatening 25 ♖xd6+! followed by 26 ♖e7 mate.

24 ... ♖be8 25 f4! 1-0

Black resigned as there is no good defence to 26 ♖d4+! and 27 f5 mate.

Guildford's long time rivals Wood Green may not field teams full of GMs these days, but they remain a force to be reckoned with. This year they were

slightly unlucky in losing no less than five of their eleven matches by the slender margin of 4½-3½ which resulted in a disappointing seventh place. On the final Sunday it was Hilsmark Kingfisher who benefited from a narrow match victory, helped by the following splendid victory by Alex Therrien who overcame a 300 point rating difference to defeat a high quality grandmaster.

Alex Therrien (2240) White

Alexander Baburin (2542) Black

Round 10

Hilsmark Kingfisher – Wood Green

Queen's Gambit Accepted

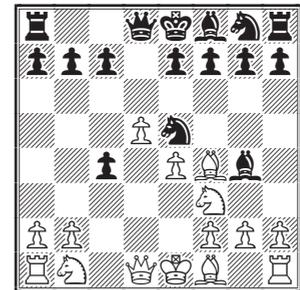
1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 e4 ♖c6!?

Baburin is an expert on the Queen's Gambit Accepted and this interesting line seems to be one of his favourites.

4 ♖f3

4 d5 ♖e5 5 ♖f4 ♖g6 6 ♖g3 e5 is similar to the game although the absence of the moves ♖g1-f3 and ... ♖c8-g4 will obviously create some differences. White's other main option is 4 ♖e3, leading to complex play after 4 ... ♖f6 5 ♖c3 e5 6 d5 ♖e7 or 6 ... ♖a5!?

4 ... ♖g4 5 d5 ♖e5 6 ♖f4



This is the critical continuation. 6 ♖bd2 e6 is less dangerous, e.g. 7 dxe6 ♖xf3+ 8 gxf3 ♖xe6 9 ♖xc4 ♖xc4 10 ♖xc4 ♖xd1+ 11 ♖xd1 ♖e7 12 ♖e2 ♖c6 13 ♖d1 ♖d8 14 ♖e3 ♖e7 15 f4 f5 16 ♖xd8+ was agreed drawn in B.Lalic-Greet, Swansea 2006.

6 ... ♖g6

6 ... ♖xf3?! 7 gxf3 does not help Black after 7 ... ♖g6 8 ♖g3 or 7 ... ♖d3+ 8 ♖xd3 cxd3 9 ♖xd3 when White's lead in development outweighs the minor structural imperfection.

7 ♖e3 ♖f6 8 ♖c3 e5!

Black must obtain a foothold in the centre.

9 ♖xc4 a6

Stopping a check on b5.

10 ♖e2 ♖d6 11 ♖d2!

A good move, offering a strategically desirable bishop exchange while sending the knight towards the queenside.

11 ... ♖d7

11 ... ♖xe2 12 ♖xe2 0-0 13 0-0 should be a little better for White, although Black has scored quite well in

the few practical encounters I was able to track down. Baburin prefers to keep more pieces on the board.

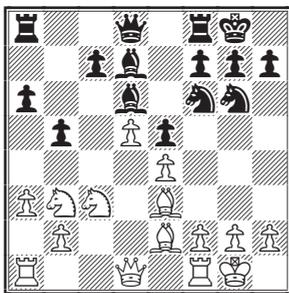
12 0-0 0-0 13 a3!

13 ♖c4 ♗b4! has scored quite well for Black, so Therrien takes a tempo to prevent this possibility.

13 ... b5!?

A double edged move; Black prevents the enemy knight from coming to c4 but permanently weakens several other key squares as well as providing White with a potential lever of a3-a4 to open a queenside file. In Ehlvest-Baburin, Oak Bridge 2000, Black preferred 13 ... ♗f4 and went on to lose. It would be interesting to know if Alexander considers the text to be an improvement, or if he simply wanted to avoid Alex's preparation.

14 ♗b3!



The knight immediately eyes the potential outposts on c5 and a5. We can evaluate the outcome of the opening as favourable to White.

14 ... ♖e7

It is important for Black to cover c5. In Antonsen-Levin, Germany 1999 Black was eventually successful with 14 ... ♗f4, but at this point either 15 ♗c5! or 15 ♗f3 ♖e7 16 ♗a5, transposing to the game, would have left White better.

15 ♗a5 ♗f4 16 ♗f3

16 ♗xf4? exf4 would greatly improve the scope of both Black's queen and dark squared bishop.

16 ... b4!?

This is not a move Black would normally wish to play, although it seems to me that he is already clearly worse. I would guess that Baburin was unable to find a convincing way to make progress on the kingside and wished to prevent White's intended b2-b4. Still, I think we have all heard the saying 'do not move pawns on the side where you are weaker' ...

17 axb4 ♗xb4 18 g3

A good move, keeping control over the position and forcing the knight away from its active location. Instead 18 ♗xf4 exf4 19 ♖e1 ♗xa5! (Not 19 ... ♖e5? 20 ♗c4) 20 ♖xa5 ♖e5 would enable Black to maintain a semblance of a dark square blockade, although his sickly queenside pawns would still render his prospects inferior. 18 ♖e1! was a promising alternative,

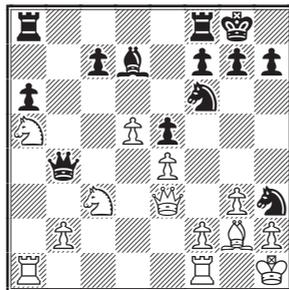
when the threat of ♗xf4 followed by e5 would probably force 18 ... ♗g6.

18 ... ♗h3+ 19 ♗h1 ♗c5

A difficult decision; although the exchange of these bishops should theoretically favour Black, it could also create problems with the subsequent defence of c7.

20 ♖d2 ♗xe3 21 ♖xe3 ♖b4 22 ♗g2

So far Therrien has played very well and unquestionably holds the advantage.



22 ... ♖xb2??

The fact that this is a catastrophic blunder should in no way detract from Therrien's achievement. So far he has out-prepared and outplayed his illustrious adversary, and although it is too early to talk about winning the game outright there is no doubt that Black is under considerable pressure in the diagram.

23 ♗xh3!

Perhaps Baburin had forgotten that White could flick in this capture. Instead 23 ♖fb1?? is impossible with f2 hanging, and 23 ♖ab1 ♖a3 enables the queen to escape.

23 ... ♗xh3 24 ♖fb1 ♖c2 25 ♖a2

But now it is all over; the queen has no squares and Black was soon forced to resign after ...

25 ... ♖xb1+ 26 ♗xb1 ♖ab8 27 ♗c3 ♗g4 28 ♖e1 f5 29 ♗c6 ♖be8 30 exf5 ♗xf5 31 ♗e4 h6 32 d6 1-0

Moving on to the final round, Guildford's first team made no mistake as they registered a crushing win over Hilsmark Kingfisher. Here we see the Frenchman Eric Prié winning with his own patented opening system.

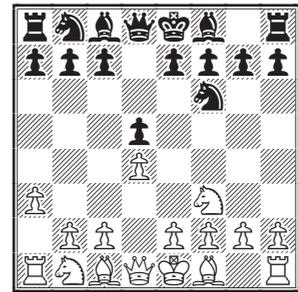
**Eric Prié (2520) White
Richard Britton (2257) Black
Round 11**

Guildford 1 – Hilsmark Kingfisher

1 d4 ♗f6 2 ♗f3 d5 3 a3!?

This is Eric's speciality, which he has wittily dubbed 'The Grand Prié Attack'! It may look like a joke, but the Frenchman has shown that the move has some genuine plus points. Its primary purpose is to serve as a useful waiting move. Depending on how Black responds, White may head for what he hopes will be a favourable reversed queen's pawn opening in

which the extra pawn move can play a significant role.



3 ... g6

Britton opts for the Grunfeld-esque response, although compared with the main lines of that opening the fact that White's c-pawn remains on its original square means that Black will have a much harder time opening the centre and utilising the fianchetto bishop.

4 ♗f4 ♗g7 5 e3 ♗bd7 6 h3

White might have considered delaying this as after 6 ♗e2 ♗h5 7 ♗g5 h6 8 ♗h4 g5 he can play 9 ♗fd2! although 9 ... gxh4 10 ♗xh5 c5 looks rather messy.

6 ... c6 7 ♗bd2 0-0 8 ♗e2 ♗e4 9 0-0 ♖b6?!

Black embarks on a risky pawn-grabbing expedition.

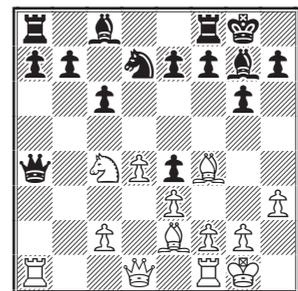
10 ♗xe4 dxe4 11 ♗d2 ♖xb2?!

Consistent, but Black will now be forced to walk a tightrope from which a single slip will mean the loss of his most powerful fighting unit.

12 ♖b1

White could have settled for a positional advantage with 12 ♗xe4 but Prié decides he has bigger fish to fry.

12 ... ♖xa3 13 ♗c4 ♖a4 14 ♖a1



14 ... ♖b5!

The only move. 14 ... ♖b4 would have led to the loss of the queen after 15 c3! ♖xc3 16 ♖c1 ♖b4 17 ♖b1 ♖c3 18 ♖b3.

15 ♖a5 ♖b4 16 c3! ♖xc3 17 ♖b1

Now it becomes clear that the queen has no escape, and Black's only chance is to sacrifice her for as much material as possible.

17 ... c5

17 ... ♗b6 may have the best chance, after which 18 ♖c1 ♗xc4 19 ♖xc3 ♗xa5 20 ♖xe4 would leave Black with rook, knight and two pawns for the queen. This actually amounts to a slight

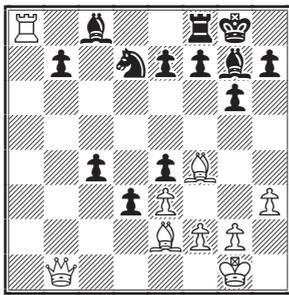
material advantage although White's position would still remain slightly preferable as his pieces are better developed while the knight on a5 is misplaced.

18 ♖b5

Even stronger would have been Pert's suggestion of 18 ♖c1! ♖b4 19 ♗a2 intending the sequence: ♖b1 ♗c3, ♗a3.

18 ... cxd4 19 ♖c1 ♗xc1+

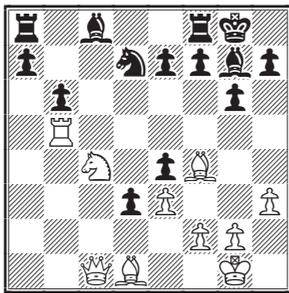
Perhaps a better chance would have been 19 ... a6!?. Now it looks superficially as though White can win easily with 20 ♖xc3 axb5 21 ♗a3!, avoiding the double attack, but it turns out that Black can obtain genuine chances with 21 ... bxc4! 22 ♗xa8 d3 reaching a position that deserves a diagram:



(analysis diagram)

For the queen Black has only a single knight, yet his army of pawns would still provide some chances, and at any rate his position looks like it would be much more fun to play! I should add that this was not all forced, and 20 ♖b3 might be safer although I definitely think this would have been worth a try for Black.

20 ♗xc1 d3 21 ♖d1 b6



This time he has a rook for the queen but far less threatening pawns.

22 ♗a3 ♖b7?

22 ... ♖c5 was essential, when Black can at least fight on for a while as 23 ♖xb6?? axb6 24 ♗xa8 ♖e6 25 ♗a2 b5, and 23 ♖xb6? axb6 24 ♗xa8 ♖d7 are both very bad for White.

23 ♗xe7

Black may have judged the e7-pawn to be unimportant, but the availability of the d6-square is a huge bonus for White and the Frenchman soon wrapped up the game with his accurate technique. The remaining moves were...

23 ... ♖c6 24 ♖b1 ♖fe8 25 ♗a3 ♖d5 26 ♖d6 ♖e6 27 f3! f5 28 ♖b5 ♖c5 29 ♖xc5! bxc5 30 ♗xc5 ♖a2 31 ♗a5 1-0

On board one I had an interesting game with Jonathan Rowson.

Andrew Greet (2445) White
Jonathan Rowson (2582) Black
Round 11

Hilsmark Kingfisher 1 – Guildford 1
Catalan Opening

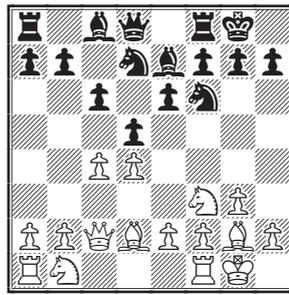
1 d4 ♖f6 2 ♖f3 d5 3 c4 e6 4 g3

I decided to surprise Jonathan by essaying the Catalan for the first time in my life.

4 ... ♖b4+ 5 ♖d2 ♖e7

I had seen that Jonathan likes to insert this bishop check. The point is that the 'free' move ♖c1-d2 is in fact slightly detrimental to White's chances as options such as b3 and ♖b2 are no longer available.

6 ♖g2 0-0 7 0-0 ♖bd7 8 ♗c2 c6



9 ♖f4

The alternative is 9 b3, intending ♖c3. For the time being I wanted to preserve the option of ♖bd2.

9 ... ♖h5

9 ... b6 is the main alternative, intending ... ♖a6, ... ♗c8 and ... c5.

10 ♖c1!

Funnily enough this is the best retreat square. The knight on h5 is now misplaced, while the bishop will re-emerge on b2 or a3.

10 ... f5

This is the only way for Black to make sense of his previous move.

11 b3

Jonathan had previously enjoyed success from this position in Addison-Rowson, Swansea 2006 which continued 11 ♖c3 b6 12 ♖e5 ♖b7 13 e3 ♖hf6 14 ♖d3 ♖d6 15 b3 ♗e7 16 a4 a5 17 ♖b2 ♗ac8 18 ♖b1 c5 19 ♖a3 ♖e4 20 ♖b5 ♖b8 21 ♖a3 ♗f6 22 ♗ac1 ♗h6 23 dxc5 bxc5 24 f4 dxc4 25 bxc4 ♖df6 26 ♖f3 ♖g4 27 ♖xg4 fxg4 28 ♖f2 ♖f6 29 e4 ♗e8 30 ♖c3 ♗h5 31 ♖h1 ♖xe4 32 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 33 ♗f2 ♗e8 34 ♗e2 ♖a8 0-1. Instead I felt it much more logical to exchange the dark squared bishops.

11 ... ♖df6!?

In case of 11 ... ♖hf6 we would transpose directly to a Stonewall Dutch. After the game Jonathan wondered

whether this might have been the better decision, although personally I feel that White should always be a bit better in that variation. With the text Black attempts to 'exploit' the slowness of White's bishop manoeuvres.

12 ♖a3 ♖xa3 13 ♖xa3

The exchange of bishops is of course strategically beneficial to White, although my queenside pieces are now slightly misplaced. The knight needs to come to d3, but in order to facilitate this I will need to move my queen for a second time to vacate c2.

13 ... ♖d7 14 e3

I wanted to prevent any ... f4 ideas once and for all.

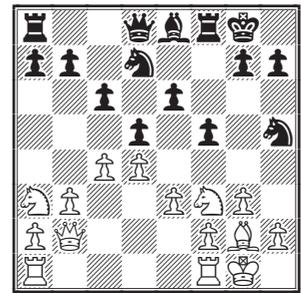
14 ... ♖e8

Jonathan sensibly improves his worst piece. 14 ... ♖e4 was seen in Korchnoi-Chandler, Hastings 1988.

15 ♗b2

Preparing ♖c2-e1-d3 with an ideal position.

15 ... ♖d7!



16 ♖e5!?

I had to adjust my plan slightly in view of 16 ♖c2 ♖hf6 17 ♖ce1 ♖h5! when 18 ♖e5 (If Black were permitted to exchange his bishop for an enemy knight then he would solve all his problems immediately.) 18 ... ♖xe5 forces the undesirable 19 dxe5.

16 ... ♖hf6

16 ... ♖xe5?! 17 dxe5 would be a bad idea for Black, whose knight will be badly misplaced for a long time.

17 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 18 ♖c2

Problem solved. Now I can bring this knight to d3 without giving Black the opportunity to exchange his bad bishop.

18 ... ♗e7 19 ♖e1 ♖f7!

Jonathan is far too strong a player to sit idly by while I improve my position. With this clever move he introduces ideas like ... dxc4 and ... e5, activating his pieces.

20 ♗c1

Reinforcing the c-pawn in anticipation of the aforementioned plan. 20 ♖d3 dxc4 21 bxc4 e5 22 ♗xb7?! ♗ab8 gives Black a strong initiative.

20 ... ♗ab8?

So far it seems that both sides have played in a largely correct manner. The text, however, is too slow and allows White to complete his regrouping and obtain a pleasant advantage. The consistent move would have been

20 ... e5! 21 cxd5 ♖xd5 22 ♖xd5+ cxd5 and now:

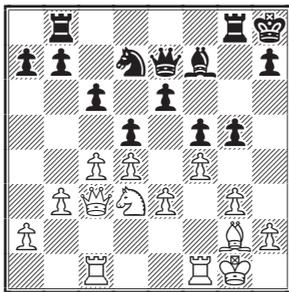
a) 23 ♖c7 ♜d6 24 ♖xb7 picks up a pawn but leaves the rook misplaced after 24 ... ♜c6 or 24 ... e4!?

b) During the game I felt that after 23 dxe5 ♗xe5 the isolated d-pawn might give White some chances for an edge, but post-game analysis revealed that Black's pieces are active enough to render the position fully equal.

21 f4?

21 ♗d3 was better; the text was a sloppy move and completely unnecessary at this stage in the game. At the time I was slightly mystified by Black's last move and began wondering if he was intending something like 21 ... dxc4 22 bxc4 e5, offering a positional pawn sacrifice whilst the rook sits defending b7. I correctly judged his compensation after 23 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 24 dxe5 to be insufficient but, in a moment of stupidity, decided to play f4 anyway 'just to make sure'. The result was that I significantly reduced my chances of success by gifting my opponent a clear target for counterplay.

21 ... ♖h8! 22 ♗d3 ♖g8 23 ♜c3 g5



White is still a little better, but the spectre of a kingside attack looms ominously on the horizon.

24 ♜b4

After the game Jonathan pointed out that 24 ♜a5! would have been more accurate. The point is that by provoking 24 ... a6 White creates a few more dark square weaknesses which he can subsequently aim to exploit.

24 ... ♜xb4!

Black gives up on the idea of a direct attack, instead looking to exploit the temporary misplacement of the enemy knight.

25 ♗xb4 gxf4 26 exf4

Ideally I would have preferred to play 26 gxf4, but after 26 ... ♖g7 intending ... ♜bg8, ... ♗h5, ... ♗f6 etc I was unable to see a convenient way of neutralising Black's initiative.

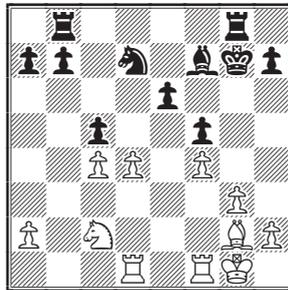
26 ... dxc4! 27 bxc4 c5! 28 ♗c2

I considered the positional sacrifice 28 ♗d3 cxd4 29 c5 but didn't rate it too highly and, in any case, this is not the sort of adventure upon which one should embark when heading into time pressure.

28 ... ♖g7!

Since his one mistake Jonathan has played excellently. For the time being he is unable to resolve the queenside tension in a favourable way, so instead he takes the opportunity to centralise his king.

29 ♖cd1!?



I think this was a good decision. It may appear more natural to use the other rook, but with the Black king coming to f6 I wanted to retain the opportunity to open the position.

29 ... ♖f6 30 d5?!

Releasing the tension makes Black's life easier. Just about any sensible 'improving' move would have been better.

30 ... ♗b6 31 ♗e3 ♖bd8

In case of 31 ... ♖gd8 I was intending 32 g4! fxg4 33 ♗xg4+ with good chances on the kingside. This is why I wanted to keep the rook on f1. 31 ... exd5 was worth considering, after which 32 cxd5 reaches a position with the potential to be dangerous for both players.

32 dxe6

The game now follows a forcing sequence resulting in equality.

32 ... ♖xe6 33 ♖xb7 ♗xc4 34 ♗d5+ ♖xd5

Black does not benefit from 34 ... ♖g7 35 ♖fe1 or 34 ... ♖f7 35 ♗c7.

35 ♖xd5 ♗e3 36 ♖xg8 ♗xd1

36 ... ♖xd1? 37 ♖xd1 ♗d1 is a very difficult ending for Black, whether or not White takes on h7.

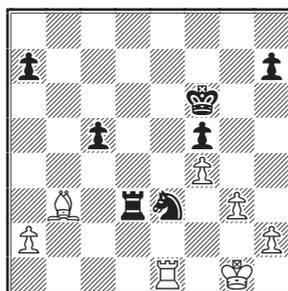
37 ♖b3 ♗e3

Perhaps 37 ... ♗c3! was Black's last chance to keep the game going, although he would certainly be taking a risk playing on with knight against bishop, especially with the f5-pawn being fixed on a light square.

38 ♖e1

38 ♖c1? c4 only helps Black.

38 ... ♗d3



39 ♖f2

39 ♖c1 c4 40 ♖xc4 ♗xc4 41 ♖xc4 ♖d1+ 42 ♖g2 ♖d2+ is completely drawn.

39 ... ♗g4+ 40 ♖g1 ♗e3

Black also has nothing better than repeating.

41 ♖f2 ♗g4+ 42 ♖g1 1/2-1/2

Elsewhere a crucial match between Guildford's second team and Barbican 1 would determine the runners up prize. Guildford fielded a higher rated team, but their opponents got off to a flying start with an early victory from Jonathan Parker on top board.

Jonathan Parker (2533) White

David Howell (2533) Black

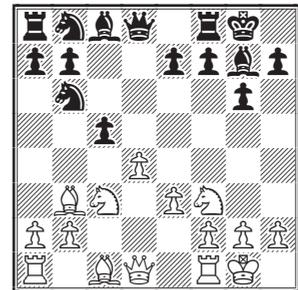
Round 11, Barbican 1 – Guildford 2

Grunfeld Defence

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 d5 4 ♗f3 ♖g7 5 cxd5 ♗xd5 6 e3 0-0 7 ♖c4 ♗b6

7 ... ♗xc3 8 bxc3 c5 would have led to a more traditional Grunfeld pawn structure, but in this particular variation Howell prefers to avoid the exchange, probably because the presence of a pawn on e3 instead of e4 would make White's centre harder to attack.

8 ♖b3 c5 9 0-0



Parker has chosen a relatively quiet anti-Grunfeld system, although certainly not one without venom as we will see.

9 ... ♖g4!?

This may not be a bad move, although if I were playing Black I would be concerned about the great potential of the bishop on b3 after the likely exchange on f3. 9 ... cxd4 is the usual move, while the more adventurous 9 ... c4!? 10 ♖c2 ♗c6 led to success for Black in Pelletier-Mamedyarov, Kemer 2007. 9 ... ♗a6 is another decent alternative.

10 dxc5 ♗6d7 11 h3 ♖xf3 12 ♜xf3 ♗xc5 13 ♖d1 ♜c8

13 ... ♗bd7 also deserved consideration.

14 ♗d5!?

The first new move. 14 e4 ♗xb3 15 axb3 ♗c6 reached a safe position for Black in J.Kolbak-M.Moe, Aalborg 1965.

14 ... ♗c6 15 e4 ♖e8?

It is after this move that Black's difficulties start to emerge. Perhaps

Black should just swipe of the bishop with 15 ... ♖xb3 when 16 ♗xb3 e6 is harmless and 16 axb3 ♗d8 17 ♕g5 ♗d7 looks safe enough.

16 ♕g5!

It is already surprisingly difficult to suggest a satisfactory way for Black to coordinate his pieces.

16 ... ♖e6

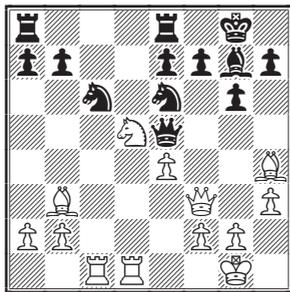
The greedy 16 ... ♕xb2 is risky after 17 ♗ab1, e.g. 17 ... ♕g7? 18 ♗dc1 ♖xb3 19 ♗xb3 when Black is in trouble. The computer points out that 17 ... ♕e5!? is better, the point being that after 18 ♗dc1 ♖xb3 19 ♗xb3 ♗e6 the bishop prevents a knight fork on c7 although 20 ♗xb7 still leaves Black struggling.

17 ♕h4 ♗b8

Once again 17 ... ♕xb2 is unsatisfactory after 18 ♗ab1 ♕g7 19 ♕a4!, e.g. 19 ... ♖ed4 20 ♗e3 e5 21 ♕xc6 (21 ♖f6+ ♕xf6 22 ♕xf6 ♗e6 is not so clear) 21 ... bxc6 22 ♖e7+ ♗xe7 23 ♕xe7 with good chances to convert the material advantage.

18 ♗ac1 ♗e5

Parker now increases his advantage in fine style.



19 ♗xc6! bxc6 20 ♖xe7+ ♖h8

20 ... ♗xe7 21 ♕xe7 ♗xb2 22 ♗d7 does not help Black.

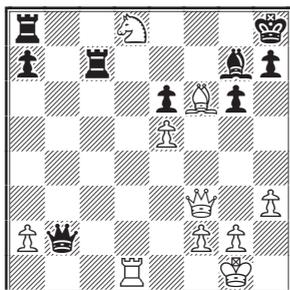
21 ♖xc6 ♗xb2 22 e5

22 ♗xf7 was also extremely strong.

22 ... ♗ec8 23 ♕f6 ♗c7?

Allowing a swift KO, although the Black position was already beyond salvation.

24 ♕xe6 fxe6 25 ♖d8!



A very attractive winning move, although White could also have won just as easily with 25 ♕xg7+! ♕xg7 (or 25 ... ♗xg7 26 ♖d8!) 26 ♗f6+ ♕g8 27 ♗d8+ ♗xd8 28 ♗xd8+ etc.

25 ... ♕xf6

25 ... ♗ac8 26 ♖xe6 is equally hopeless.

26 ♗xa8 ♗c2 27 ♖f7+ 1-0

Black resigned as he will soon be mated after 27 ... ♕g7 28 ♗h8+ ♕xf7 29 ♗xf6+ followed by ♗d8. A very nice game from Parker.

Despite this success Guildford's star-studded line-up eventually proved too strong although Barbican did manage one more individual win. I leave you with the following finely played game.

Simon Knott (2357) White
Graeme Buckley (2390) Black
Round 11
Barbican 1 – Guildford 2
English/Hedgehog

1 ♖f3

Simon always opens with this move.

1 ... ♖f6 2 c4 c5 3 ♖c3 b6 4 g3 ♕b7 5 ♕g2 e6

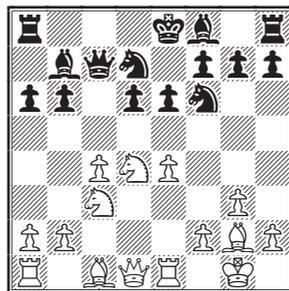
Graeme responds with the Hedgehog system, although he may have come to rue this decision as Knott is something of an expert on the White side of this variation.

6 0-0 d6 7 ♗e1 a6 8 e4 ♖bd7?!

It may seem strange to criticise this natural move (the knight will practically always come to this square in the Hedgehog), but it ends up presenting White with a useful extra option. A more precise move order would have been 8 ... ♕e7 9 d4 cxd4 10 ♖xd4 ♗c7 (Black must watch out for e5 tricks.) leading to normal positions after a subsequent ... ♖bd7.

9 d4 cxd4 10 ♖xd4 ♗c7

10 ... ♕e7? is unplayable due to 11 e5.



11 ♖d5!

White can obtain an edge with 11 ♕e3 as 11 ... ♗xc4? 12 ♗c1 would be too risky. Nevertheless, the specific move order seen in the game presents White with an opportunity to play even more ambitiously.

11 ... exd5 12 exd5+ ♖e5!

This looks like relatively the best defence, returning the extra piece in order to ensure the Black king's survival, at least in the short- to mid-term. To make matters worse for Graeme – not that he would have known at the time – Simon had already

reached the same position seventeen years prior to the present game! In Knott-Giddins, London 1991 Black preferred 12 ... ♕d8 but soon went down after 13 ♖c6+ ♕xc6 14 dxc6 ♖e5?? and 1-0 on account of 15 ♗xe5. Of course 14 ... ♖c5 would have been better, although White can still obtain a raging attack with 15 b4 ♖e6 16 c5! as seen in several games. Finally we should note that 12 ... ♕e7 does not help Black after 13 ♖f5 ♖e5 14 ♖xe7 ♗xe7 15 f4, regaining the piece with a clear advantage.

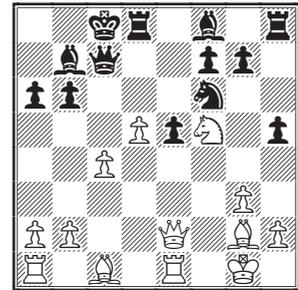
13 f4 0-0-0 14 fxe5 dxe5 15 ♖f5

The position has stabilised, and White stands clearly better. His pieces are more active, his king is safer and he has good chances to mobilise his queenside pawns.

15 ... h5!

This looks like the best chance; the only way to worry White is to aim for kingside counterplay.

16 ♗e2!?



The first new move. In Nielsen-Damljanovic, France 2007 the continuation was 16 h3 ♕c5+ 17 ♖h1 (17 ♕e3!? may be an improvement.) 17 ... g6 18 ♕g5 gxf5 19 ♕xf6 e4 20 ♕xd8 ♖xd8 when Black had obtained some counterplay and eventually managed to draw.

16 ... g6 17 ♕g5

17 ♖e3 h4! would be mildly irritating.

17 ... ♖g4!

Buckley is doing his best to drum up counterplay ...

18 ♖e3!

... but Knott is having none of it! 18 ♕xd8? ♕c5+ 19 ♖h1 (Of course not 19 ♖f1?? ♖xh2 mate!) 19 ... ♗xd8 would leave Black with at least a draw by repetition.

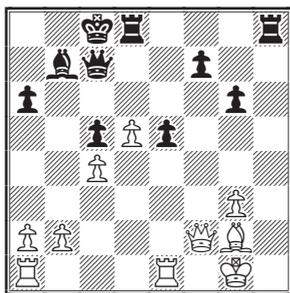
18 ... ♖xe3

Perhaps 18 ... f6!? 19 ♖xg4 fxe5 could have been considered. Black's structure is less than perfect, but his unopposed dark squared bishop might provide some chances.

19 ♕xe3

Now Black's life becomes very difficult. White has everything under control and has a clear plan of mobilising his more dangerous pawn majority.

19 ... h4 20 ♖f2! hxg3 21 hxg3 ♕c5
22 ♕xc5 bxc5



22 ... ♕xc5 would lose the e-pawn.

23 b4!

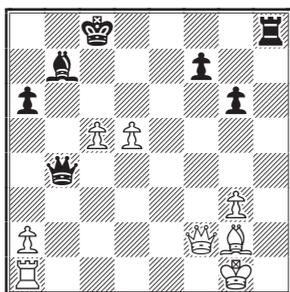
An excellent move. The loss of the pawn is immaterial; All that White cares about is opening files on the queenside and mobilising his c- and d-pawns.

23 ... cxb4 24 ♖eb1 e4 25 ♖xb4 e3!?

Black's situation is already desperate, and Buckley tries to randomise the game by opening as many lines as possible before he is crushed on the queenside. Unfortunately for him Knott defends coolly.

26 ♕xe3 ♖de8 27 ♖f2 ♖e2!?

28 ♕xe2 ♕c5+ 29 ♖f2 ♕xb4 30 c5!



This is the moment White has been waiting for! The game is now as good as over.

30 ... ♕c3 31 ♖d1 ♖d8 32 ♕d4 ♕c2

32 ... ♕xg3 33 c6 ♕xc6 34 ♖c1 wins easily enough.

33 ♖d2 ♕f5 34 d6 ♕xg2 35 ♕xg2

36 ♕d7 36 ♕d5 ♕b5 37 ♕a8+ ♕d7

38 ♕a7+ 1-0

Division 1 Final Score Table

Team	W	D	L	Game Points	Match points
Guildford-ADC 1	10	1	0	67½	21
Guildford-ADC 2	10	0	1	58	20
Barbican 1	8	1	2	53½	17
Betsson.com	7	1	3	47½	15
The ADs	6	0	5	49	12
Hilsmark Kingfisher 1	3	3	5	39½	9
Wood Green	3	2	6	42	8
Richmond	3	2	6	41½	8
Cambridge University 1	3	2	6	37	8
Barbican 2	3	1	7	34½	7
North West Eagles 1	0	3	8	27½	3
Slough Sharks 1	1	2	8	30½	3*

* Slough Sharks docked one point for excessive defaults.

Division 2 Final Score Table

Team	W	D	L	Game Points	Match points
White Rose	9	1	1	54	19
Bristol 1	8	1	2	56	17
Pride and Prejudice	8	1	2	55½	17
SW Dragons 1	6	2	3	48	14
Guildford ADC 3	6	2	3	46½	14
Oxford 1	6	0	5	52½	12
Poisoned Pawns 1	5	2	4	47½	12
Wessex 1	4	3	4	45½	11
Cheddleton-Pointon	3	1	7	39½	7
Kings Head	3	0	8	32½	3
Barbican 4NCL Youth	1	1	9	30½	3
Hilsmark Kingfisher 2	0	0	11	16	0

The twelve teams in Division 1 will be joined next season by newly crowned Division 2 Champions White Rose, in addition to Bristol 1, Pride and Prejudice and South Wales Dragons 1 who narrowly secured the final promotion spot ahead of Guildford 3, thus denying Nigel Povah the prospect of a 1-2-3 finish next year! For readers who missed last month's report, next season will see a reorganisation of the league whereby the number of teams in Division 1 will increase to 16. This change has meant that no-one will be relegated from either of the top two divisions; a welcome stroke of luck for the teams in question!

A full explanation of the newly restructured league will be provided in my first report next season. As always, full details about the 4NCL can be found at www.4ncl.co.uk.

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