

4NCL: A Final Twist

by IM Andrew Greet

The 2009/10 season drew to a climax on 1–3 May. The final weekend featured drama aplenty, with an incredible twist in the title race and a nail-biting relegation battle, plus the usual assortment of hard-fought games.

Heading into the final weekend, it was no surprise to see the two top-rated teams, Wood Green Hilsmark Kingfisher (WGHK) and Pride & Prejudice (P&P), leading the tables, with WGHK narrowly ahead on game points. The two giants had battled to a 4-4 draw earlier in the season and decimated all other challengers. However, two other contenders were lying just a single match point behind: Barbican 1 and White Rose 1. The former two had yet to face the latter two, and it was all but certain that the final standings would hinge on the outcomes of these heavyweight matches.

I have already mentioned that P&P drew their all-important match with WGHK 1 earlier in the season, leaving both teams sharing the lead in terms of match points. In round 9 WGHK would have a second – albeit slimmer – chance to derail their rivals as their second team, which had succeeded in qualifying for the championship pool by finishing in the top half of their group, came face to face with the joint favourites for the title. On board one, this writer faced the biggest challenge of his career against Mickey Adams. This was my first time playing a 2700 at a classical time control, and needless to say I was delighted to achieve a draw, especially after having been on the brink of defeat. Even better, it kept me on track for a first GM norm, which I succeeded in getting after scoring a draw and a win in the final two games. Despite this and a few other well contested draws, WGHK went down in the match courtesy of wins from GMs Flear, Hebden and Ward. The P&P machine had overcome its first hurdle of the weekend.

Elsewhere WGHK kept up their own momentum with a convincing 6½–1½ victory over former title rivals Guildford AD&C 1. The defending champions were bolstered by the inclusion of Norway's 'other' teenage sensation, Jon Ludvig Hammer, who has shot through the 2600 barrier in the past year and might even be on course to challenge his friend and compatriot Mr Carlsen if he keeps going like this. Here is the finish to his round 9 game.

J. Hammer (2617) – D.King (2494)
WGHK 1 v Guildford 1



Black has just retreated his rook from d6 to d7. Both sides have had certain achievements, but the kingside threats turn out to be more significant.

26 ♖g4 ♗e6 27 ♜xh6+ ♜f8

The loss of the h6-pawn is by no means fatal for Black. He has plenty of pieces with reach of the kingside, and will soon have a powerful passed pawn with which to trouble his opponent.

28 ♜f5 ♜xb2 29 ♜h5 ♜e5?!

Black should have taken the opportunity to remove the troublesome knight with 29 ... ♜xf5! 30 ♜xf5 and now 30 ... ♜e5!. Although Black's kingside is a little shaky his position holds together. White's chances are still somewhat higher, but the strong passed c-pawn would make any result possible.

30 f4!

White could also have kept come advantage with 30 ♜h8+ ♜g8 31 ♜d4, but the text is just as good and also sets a lovely trap.

30 ... ♜c3?

Overlooking a devastating refutation. Black had to play 30 ... ♜c7, although White remains clearly better after 31 ♜c2, and can increase the pressure either by doubling on the d-file or activating the f1-rook along the third rank.

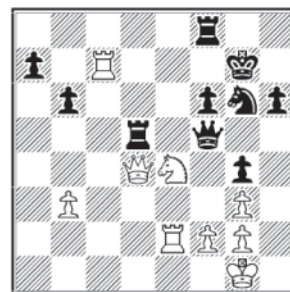
31 ♜h8+ ♜g8



32 ♜xd5! 1–0

Elsewhere Barbican 1 overcame Cambridge University by a score of 5½–2½ while White Rose scraped a narrow victory against the ADs thanks to Colin McNab's solid technique and Richard Palliser's tactical sharpness:

R. Palliser (2435) – J.Richardson (2298)
White Rose 1 v The ADs



32 ... ♜h8?

32 ... ♜f7? 33 ♜xf7+ ♜xf7 34 ♜d6+ ♜xd6 35 ♜xd6 was no good, but 32 ... ♜g8! would have kept the game unclear. White obviously has compensation for the missing pawn, but no clear breakthrough that I can see.

33 ♜xf6!

This elegant shot effectively ends the game.

33 ... ♜xf6

33 ... ♜xd4 34 ♜h7 mate; 33 ... ♜xf6 34 ♜e8+ ♜f8 35 ♜xf8 mate.

34 ♜xd5

With a material deficit and a hopelessly exposed king, Black's days are numbered.

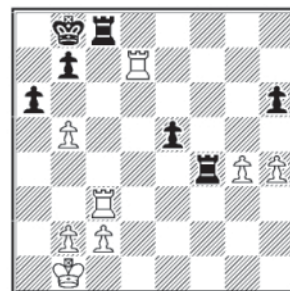
34 ... ♜d8 35 ♜d7 ♜c8 36 ♜e6 ♜a1+ 37 ♜h2 ♜g8 38 ♜b7

Thus all four of the top teams had cleared their respective hurdles in round 9, and would pair off against one another in the final two pivotal rounds.

1–0

On to Saturday's matches, and life did not get any easier for Britain's number one. He certainly succeeded in building up some advantage, until the following critical position was reached.

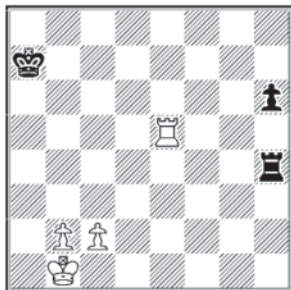
M. Adams (2704) – L.D'Costa (2466)
P&P v Barbican 4NCL 1



Black is a pawn down, but his active rook on f4 combined with the limited amount of material might easily pose White some problems.

35 bxa6?

This leads to a position with two extra pawns, but alas, no win. White could have obtained excellent winning chances with 35 ♖xb7+! ♜xb7 36 bxa6+ The a-pawn will enable White to regain the rook, leaving a position with connected b- and c-pawns instead of the doubled pawns that arise in the game. My main line runs as follows: 36 ... ♜b8 37 a7+ ♜xa7 38 ♖xc8 ♖xg4 39 ♖e8 ♖xh4 40 ♖xe5



I do not want to state with 100% certainty that White is winning this position, but if I were a betting man I know where I would put my money.

35 ... ♖xc3 36 ♖xb7+ ♜a8 37 bxc3 ♖xg4 38 ♖e7 e4

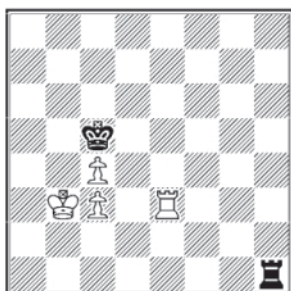


Despite the two pawn deficit, Black just manages to hold on.

39 h5

White would love to get his king involved, but tragically he is just one tempo too slow: 39 ♜b2 ♖xh4 40 ♜b3 ♖g4 41 ♜b4 ♖g6! 42 ♜b5 ♖g5+ If White's front c-pawn was just one square further up the board, it would have been able to block this check, thus either forcing the win or at least giving excellent practical chances. But as it stands, White can make no further progress.

39 ... ♖h4 40 ♖e5 ♜a7 41 ♜b2 ♜xa6 42 c4 ♖h3 43 c3 ♜b6 44 ♜b3 ♜c6 45 ♖e6+ ♜c5 46 ♖xh6 e3 47 ♖e6 ♖xh5 48 ♖xe3 ♖h1



This rook ending is about as drawn as they come. The second c-pawn does not increase White's chances in any significant way, and although Adams plays on for a while, the result is no longer in doubt. The remaining moves were:

49 ♖e5+ ♜c6 50 ♜c2 ♜d6 51 ♖f5 ♜c6 52 ♖g5 ♖f1 53 ♖a5 ♖h1 54 ♖e5 ♜d6 55 ♖f5 ♜c6 56 ♖f8 ♖g1 57 ♖e8 ♖h1 58 ♖c8+ ♜d7 59 ♖g8 ♜c6 60 ♖g5 ♖f1 61 c5 ♖h1 62 ♜b3 ♖h4 63 ♖f5 ♖g4 64 ♖h5 ♖f4 65 c4 ♖f1 66 ♜c2

An excellent result for Lorin, although as I jokingly told him in the bar that evening, "I softened him up first!"
½-½

And if you thought that was a setback for P&P, just look at what happened on board 5, where Barbican's Sam Collins came up with an incredibly brash attacking plan in what is usually a fairly quiet opening variation.

J. Emms (2484) – S.Collins (2401)
P&P v Barbican 4NCL 1
Giuoco Piano

1 e4 e5 2 ♖c4 ♖f6 3 d3 ♖c6 4 ♖f3 ♜c5 5 c3 a6 6 ♜b3 ♜a7 7 0-0 d6 8 ♖e1



So far everything has proceeded normally, but now Collin embarks on an extraordinary attacking concept.

8 ... ♖g4!?

At first glance this audacious lunge looks like a beginner's move, but it proves surprisingly awkward to meet.

9 ♖e2

Black's previous move only appears in a couple of other games on the database. One of them was Langer – Chen, Indianapolis 2009, which continued 9 d4?! exd4 10 cxd4 ♖xd4! This is a well-known motif, which can also arise in certain variations of the Ruy Lopez. 11 ♖xd4 ♖h4 The double attack on f2 and h2 is hard to meet. 12 ♜e3 ♖xh2+ 13 ♜f1 ♖h1+ 14 ♜e2 ♖xg2 15 ♖g1 ♖xe3 16 ♜xe3 ♖xd4+ 17 ♜xd4 ♖xf2+ Black may not have a mating attack, but with a safer king and four pawns for the piece, he has good reason to feel optimistic.

9 ... ♖f6

I found one other obscure internet game in which Black made the cowardly decision to castle, which was obviously completely inconsistent with his previous move.

10 ♖bd2

10 h3 would almost certainly have been met by 10 ... h5 when White can hardly contemplate opening the h-file.

10 ... g5!?

In terms of strategy, Black has already well and truly nailed his colours to the mast, so this additional show of aggression should come as no surprise.

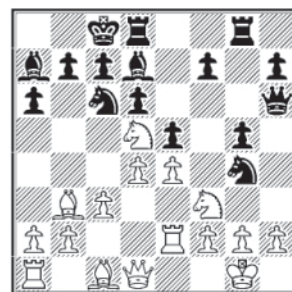
11 d4

Black was threatening to take twice on f2 followed by ... g4, pocketing an extra exchange. Furthermore, fighting for the centre seems like a logical reaction to Black's attack on the flank.

11 ... ♖d7 12 ♖f1 ♖g8 13 ♖e3

In the event of 13 h3, Black can no longer afford to play 13 ... h5? as 14 hxg4 hxg4 15 dxe5 dxe5 16 ♖xg5 is just winning for White. However, after the much better 13 ... ♖h6! White will have a hard time dealing with ... g4, opening the g-file.

13 ... 0-0-0 14 ♖d5 ♖h6



Attacking h2, and thereby threatening to take twice on d4.

15 ♜e3?

Up to this point White has played quite sensibly, but the text move is a mistake; presumably Emms overlooked Black's powerful reply. Critical was 15 h3 ♖f6 16 h4 winning a pawn, although I suppose White was worried that the opening of kingside files would offset any material gain. Another less committal improvement would have been 15 ♜a4!?, intending ♜xc6 and ♖e7+ as well as a possible b4-b5 when White develops an attack of his own.

15 ... f5!

Black could also have won material with 15 ... ♖xe3 16 fxe3 g4 17 ♖d2 g3 18 h3 ♖g4! However, after the exchange sacrifice 19 ♖f1! (19 ♖f3 ♖xf3 20 gxf3 ♖xh3 21 ♖f1 ♖h4) 19 ... ♖xe2 20 ♖xe2 White has reasonable compensation, with a safe king and active prospects for all his pieces. The game continuation is much stronger; Black simply presses ahead with his attack.

16 h3

Otherwise White will have a hard time keeping h2 defended.

16 ... ♖xe3 17 fxe3

White has made one important achievement: he has created a barrier against the bishop on a7. Unfortunately

this is nowhere near enough to make up for the vulnerability of his kingside.

17 ... g4 18 hxc4 fxe4



19 Qh2?!

Too passive. White could have posed more problems by flicking in 19 g5! although Black remains on top as follows: 19 ... ♖g7 20 Qd2 (or 20 Qh2 ♜xg5 with an extra pawn and a serious attack) 20 ... exd4 21 exd4. Here Black's strongest continuation looks to be 21 ... Qxd4! 22 cxd4 ♜xd4+ 23 Qe3 (23 Qh1 ♜xg5) 23 ... ♜xg5. Black has given up a piece, but it was worth it to give the a7-bishop a clear view of the board. Furthermore he has three healthy pawns and an ongoing attack, so his chances are clearly higher; nevertheless White could still fight on for a while.

19 ... ♜xg4 20 ♜d2!?

White decides to give up an exchange. 20 Qxg4 ♜xg4 would have been even worse, as ... ♜h4 will be devastating.

20 ... ♜xe2 21 ♜xe2 ♜g5 22 ♜f1



22 ... ♜f8

A good alternative was 22 ... exd4!? 23 exd4 Qxd4! Once again we see this idea to liberate the bishop. 24 cxd4 ♜xd4+ 25 Qh1 ♜e5 26 g4 c6. With a rook and three huge pawns for a knight, plus a monstrous bishop, Black is winning.

23 Qg4 ♜g7

23 ... ♜xf1+ 24 ♜xf1 ♜g7 would have been slightly more accurate, although the text does not spoil anything.

24 Qh2?!

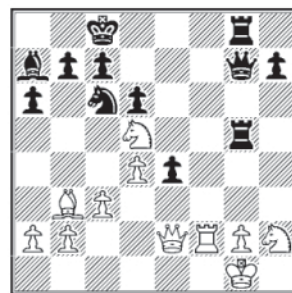
The last chance to prolong the game was 24 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 25 Qd6, although with an extra exchange and pawn, Black should win in the long run.

24 ... ♜g8 25 ♜f2

When the computer's top choice is 25 Qf4, you know the situation is bad.

25 ... exd4 26 exd4

Now Collins finishes in style:



26 ... Qxd4!

We have already seen this idea in a few of the earlier notes, and here it is more devastating than ever.

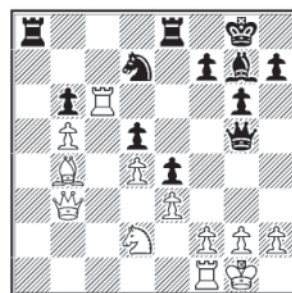
27 cxd4 ♜xd4 28 Qf4 ♜xg2+

This excellent win set the underdogs firmly on the road towards a remarkable upset against a team that outrated them by an average of more than 120 FIDE rating points per board. Usually one would have expected the higher rated team to claw some points back on the other board, but as the match went on it was Barbican who increased their lead, winning the games in which they held the advantage and drawing those where they stood worse. Mark Ferguson defeated Glenn Flear convincingly, and John Cox overcame Harriet Hunt, who had begun the season with an incredible 7/5/8.

0-1

Even the UK's brightest young star, David Howell, was unable to conjure anything for the favourites. We join his game with GM Jonathan Parker at move 20

J. Parker (2523) – D.Howell (2612)
Barbican 4NCL 1 v P&P



20 ... ♜e6?

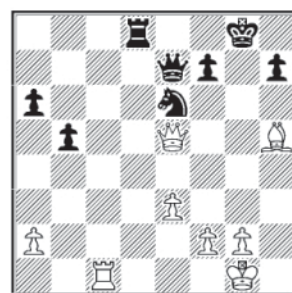
Already under unpleasant pressure, Black overlooks a simple tactical shot. 21 ♜xe6 fxe6 22 Qxe4! Black cannot recapture, as he would lose the e6-pawn followed by the knight on d7. Black had nothing better than: 22 ... ♜d8 ... but after ... 23 Qd2 he was a pawn down for absolutely nothing, and despite tenacious defence, he eventually went down on move 74. 1-0

The final match score of 6-2 made for a resounding upset, with major championship ramifications to boot. There is nothing especially unusual about, say, an IM winning the odd game against a GM from time to time.

However, for a team to score four wins and four draws against opponents outrating them on every board is extremely impressive.

Could White Rose pull off a similar giant-killing act against WGHK? Four of their players – Richard Palliser, Simon Buckley, Peter Gayson and David Adams – made what must have been quite satisfying draws against Grandmasters Baburin, Pert, Speelman and Berczes respectively. Unfortunately the other four players succumbed to their higher rated opponents, with notable victories coming from McShane and Hammer versus Wells and McNab respectively. On board 5, GM Stephen Gordon was quick to exploit a tactical error from his opponent.

S. Gordon (2527) – M.Townsend (2222)
WGHK 1 v White Rose 1



We join the game at move 29, by which time Black was already under some pressure due to his weakened kingside. 29 ... ♜g5? It is understandable that Black was anxious to get the queens off, but it turns out that Gordon had anticipated this move and prepared a devastating response: 30 ♜xf7+! ♜xf7 31 ♜c7+! Taking full advantage of the unstable position of the enemy queen. 31 ... ♜f8? The only way to prolong the game was 31 ... ♜g8 32 ♜xe6+ ♜h8 although White would be a strong favourite to convert his extra pawn. 32 ♜h8+ and Black resigned in view of 32 ... ♜g8 33 ♜f6+ with mate next move. 1-0

Let us take a quick break from the championship race to see a few other notable events from the weekend. Firstly I must congratulate my team-mate Peter Sowray on achieving his second IM norm after an excellent season. The following encounter took place in round 10, in the match between WGHK 2 and Cambridge University, which the former won by a convincing 6-2 scoreline. In this game Peter showcases his attacking prowess along with some extremely impressive opening preparation.

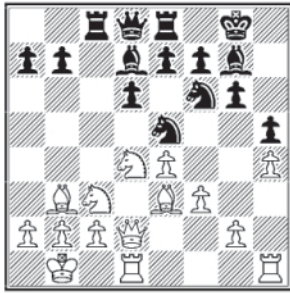
P.Sowray (2334) –
A.Eckersley-Waites (2197)
WGHK 2 v Cambridge University 1
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Qf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Qxd4
Qf6 5 Qc3 g6 6 ♜e3 ♜g7 7 f3 Qc6

8 ♖d2 0-0 9 ♙c4 ♙d7 10 0-0-0 ♜c8
11 ♙b3 ♙e5 12 ♙b1 ♜e8

The present variation can arguably be considered the absolute main line of the Dragon at present.

13 h4 h5



14 g4

White opts for a policy of all-out aggression. 14 ♙h6 is a relatively calm alternative, although I hardly need state that the play can become quite sharp here as well.

14 ... hxcg4 15 h5 ♙xh5 16 ♙h6 e6

16 ... ♙h7!? has only been tried once: 17 ♙xg7 ♙xg7 18 fxg4 ♙xg4 19 ♙f5+ ♙xf5 20 exf5 ♜h8 21 fxg6 ♙xg6 was Radjabov – Kasimdzhanov, Elista 2008. White has ongoing compensation for the two-pawn deficit and went on to win, although in view of the crisis Black appears to be suffering in the main line, perhaps Dragon fans will be forced to investigate this and other deviations in more detail.

17 ♙dg1 ♜f6

In a later game Kasimdzhanov tried to improve with 17 ... g3!? but after 18 ♙xh5! gxh5 19 ♙xg3 ♙g6 20 ♙f5! he came under heavy pressure in Vachier Lagrave – Kasimdzhanov, San Sebastian 2009, and once again failed to solve his problems.

18 fxg4 ♙xh6 19 ♜xh6 ♜g7



In case you were wondering, this is all established theory. White's next move is a recent finesse, which casts a serious shadow over his opponent's entire opening strategy.

20 ♖d2!

For a while the only move played was 20 ♖e3, leading after 20 ... ♙f6 21 g5 ♙h5 to a similar position to that reached in the game. I suppose it was just assumed that the queen must be slightly more actively placed on e3 than d2; indeed, the only move to have been played here is 22 ♙db5, looking to regain a pawn on the queenside.

4NCL Championship Pool 2009/10

	W	D	L	Pts
Wood Green Hilsmark				
Kingfisher 1	6	1	0	13
Pride & Predudice	5	1	1	11
Barbican 4NCL 1	5	0	2	10
White Rose 1	4	0	3	8
Wood Green Hilsmark				
Kingfisher 2	3	0	4	6
Guildford-A&DC 1	2	0	5	4
Cambridge University 1	1	1	5	3
The ADs	0	1	6	1

However, it turns out that by retreating one step further the queen can assist in a far more dangerous attacking plan directed against the enemy king.

20 ... ♙f6 21 g5 ♙h5 22 ♙ce2!

Now the plan starts to become clear: the knight is heading for g3 in order to destroy the blockader on the h-file. After the probable ... ♙xg3, the rook will recapture and switch to h3, and the queen can swing over to h2 to add some real muscle to the attack.

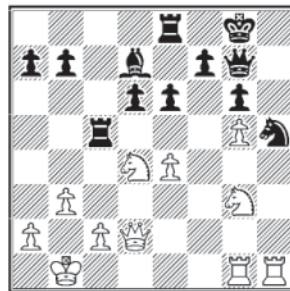
22 ... ♙c4

This is certainly the most natural move, although I guess Black will need to look for an improvement somewhere over the next few moves, or perhaps even earlier ...

23 ♙xc4 ♙xc4 24 b3!

The rook must be driven away in order to free up the e2-knight from its defensive duties.

24 ... ♙c5 25 ♙g3

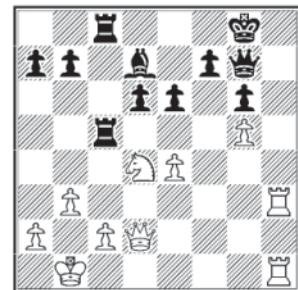


25 ... ♙f4?

4NCL Demotion Pool 2009/10

	W	D	L	Pts
Betsson.com	7	0	0	14
Barbican 4NCL 2	5	0	2	10
Oxford 1	4	0	3	8
Pandora's Box Grantham	3	1	3	7
South Wales Dragons	3	0	4	6
Guildford-A&DC 2	1	2	4	4
Poisoned Pawns 1	2	0	5	4
Jutes of Kent	1	1	5	3

This is the first new move ... and unfortunately it loses more or less by force. White's new plan was first unveiled in the game J. Polgar – Kaidanov, Hilton Head 2010, part of a four-game Sicilian-themed exhibition match in which a different, predetermined variation of the Sicilian was contested in each game. Play continued 25 ... ♙xg3 26 ♙xg3 ♜ec8 27 ♙gh3!



I have no idea if this was the result of expert calculation or thorough home preparation, but either way the outcome is deadly for Black. 27 ... e5 28 ♙h4 exd4 29 ♙h2 ♙f8 30 ♙xd6+ ♙g8 31 ♙xd7 d3 32 c4 ♙c3 33 ♙4h2! White can just spare the time for a single defensive move before regrouping for the final assault. 33 ... b5 34 e5! ♙xe5 35 ♙h7 ♙5c7 36 ♙d6! 1-0

26 ♙xf4 ♙xd4

26 ... e5 is refuted by 27 ♙f6 with the following forced line: 27 ... ♙xf6 (27 ... exd4 28 ♙xd6+) 28 gxf6 exd4 29 ♙h4 ♙e6 30 ♙gh1 ♙h5 31 ♙xh5 gxh5 32 ♙xh5 ♙xf6 33 ♙5h4 intending ♙d1 with an easily winning endgame.

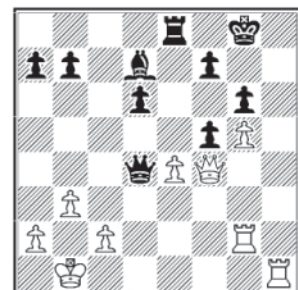
27 ♙g2

Black is utterly helpless against the simple plan of doubling on the h-file followed by a blocking move like ♙f6, or even better e5, to cut off the Black queen's defence of h8.

27 ... ♙f5!?

This is Black's best chance. All other plausible moves are refuted by either 28 ♙gh2 or 28 ♙f6.

28 ♙xf5 exf5



29 ♙d2!

This small finesse seals White's victory. The immediate 29 ♙gh2 ♙xe4 allows Black to fight on for a while longer, so Sowray first drives the queen to an unfavourable square.

29 ... ♙c3

29 ... ♖xe4 30 ♜dh2! wins immediately, while 29 ... ♖e5 30 ♖xe5 ♜xe5 31 ♜xd6 should be a straightforward technical conversion.

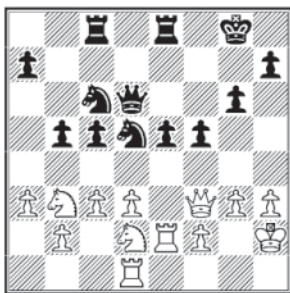
30 ♜d3 ♖g7 31 ♜dh3 fxe4

This loses instantly, although alternatives would only delay the inevitable, for instance: 31 ... ♜e6 32 ♖h2 ♖f8 33 ♜h8+ ♖e7 34 ♖h6! when Black can resign.

32 ♜h7 1-0

Congratulations must also go to Graham Morrison of Barbican and Ian Thompson of Guildford A&DC, both of whom made IM norms this season. Graham has actually annotated all of his games from this season and made them available in Chessbase format on the 4NCL website. I would recommend checking this out, as his insightful and honest commentary makes interesting reading. The final IM norm recipient was Alexei Slavin of Pandora's box, a newly promoted team that was caught up in a bitter fight to avoid relegation (more on that later). Here is the end of his game from round 10, played in a match against Barbican 2.

M. Piper (2320) – A. Slavin (2368)
Barbican 4NCL 2 v Pandora's Box



We join the game after Black's 29th move (29 ... ♖d7-d6). White's position is a bit cramped, but with no notable weaknesses he should not be doing too badly.

30 c4!?

Rather a double-edged move, but by no means a bad one if followed up correctly.

30 ... ♜c7 31 ♜de1?

A peculiar decision, and completely inconsistent with his previous move. It was essential to play 31 cxb5 ♜xb5 32 ♜c4. In the resulting position both sides have outposts for their knights and slight pawn weaknesses, which should more or less cancel each other out to approximately equality. Even if it were proven that White stands worse here, his practical chances would be much higher than in the game.

31 ... b4! Slavin immediately capitalises on his opponent's inaccuracy. The white knights are denied any effective squares, while White is stuck with a weak d-pawn and a gaping hole on d4.

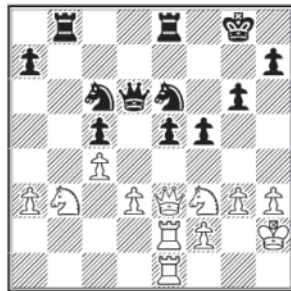
32 ♖e3 ♜e6 33 ♜f3

33 axb4 ♜xb4 would leave d3 too weak.

33 ... bxa3!

Black takes the opportunity to open a second avenue of attack.

34 bxa3 ♜b8



35 ♜c1

In the event of 35 ♜b1 then 35 ... ♜b6 looks strong, threatening ... ♜eb8. It should be noted that 36 ♜xe5? loses to 36 ... ♜ed4 37 ♜xd4 ♜xe5 and Black wins a piece.

35 ... ♜ed4 36 ♜d2 ♜b1!?

Also very strong was 36 ... e4! 37 ♜xd4 (37 ♜g1 ♜e5) 37 ... ♜xd4 and with ... ♜f3(+) coming, Black wins an exchange and the game. The text move does not spoil anything though.

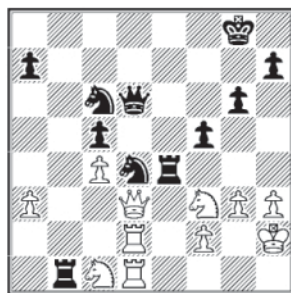
37 ♜ed1 e4!

The same idea is almost as strong a move later.

38 dxe4!?

The most resilient defence would have been 38 ♜xd4 cxd4 (38 ... ♜xd4 39 dxe4 ♜xe4 40 ♖c3 is clearly better for Black, but the text is clearer.) 39 dxe4! Most other moves would be refuted by ... ♜e5 or ... e3. 39 ... fxe4 40 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 41 ♜xd4 ♜b6 Black should win this with careful play, but White could at least try to resist for a while and perhaps even dream of counterplay with a knight on d5.

38 ... ♜xe4 39 ♖d3



39 ... ♜xc1!

This simple tactic kills the game.

40 ♜xc1 ♜xf3+

White resigned, as the imminent ... ♜d4 will net Black a full extra piece. Despite this fine win, Pandora's Box lost the match, leaving an intriguing situation at the lower end of the table as we will soon see.

0-1

As for the top of the table, WGHK 1 went into the final round one match point

clear of Barbican 1, thus knowing that a 4-4 draw would be sufficient to retain their Division 1 crown. The question was whether Barbican would be able to reproduce their outstanding form from the previous day. Unfortunately for the underdogs – and presumably most neutrals – the trick was not to be repeated, and despite several competitive games, the result never really looked like being anything other than a win for the favourites. The final result was 6-2, with four wins for WGHK and four draws. I'm sure Sam Collins would have loved nothing more than a repeat of his splendid attacking performance against Emms, but in the following game Nick Pert's iron technique spoiled any such dreams.

N. Pert (2541) – S. Collins (2401)

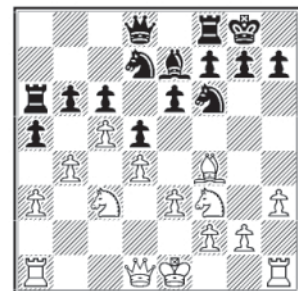
WGHK 1 v Barbican 4NCL 1

Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♜f3 ♜f6 4 ♜c3 ♜e7 5 ♜f4 0-0 6 e3 ♜bd7 7 c5

True to his style, Pert aims for positional pressure while stifling any prospects for active counterplay with ... c5. The other main possibilities are 7 ♖c2 and 7 a3

7 ... c6 8 h3 b6 9 b4 a5 10 a3 ♜a6 11 ♜xa6 ♜xa6



12 b5!

There is obviously nothing wrong with 12 0-0, but the text must surely be considered the most principled way to challenge Black's set-up.

12 ... cxb5 13 c6 ♖c8 14 c7

White has sacrificed a pawn in order to obtain a huge passer on c7, which can be supported by a knight on b5 and rook(s) on the c-file. Black on the other hand must either look for a way to surround and neutralise (or win) the pawn, or mobilise his own queenside pawns to create counterplay.

14 ... ♜xa3?!

This seems to be new, but it turns out badly for Black. This position has been reached in several previous games, some of them featuring high-level grandmasters. The usual continuation has been 14 ... b4 15 ♜b5 a4 16 ♜c1 ♜e4 17 ♜d2 ♜c3 18 ♜xc3 bxc3 19 ♜xc3 and now either 19 ... b5 (or 19 ... ♖b7).

15 ♜xb5 ♜b4+ 16 ♜e2

The position of the king is not a problem, as the centre is blocked and the black pieces are in no position to mount an attack.

16 ... ♖e4 17 ♖c2 ♖a8



18 ♖hb1!

This looks more purposeful than the natural 18 ♖hc1, as Black will now have to start thinking about ♖xb4 ideas.

18 ... ♖e8?

After this Black's position becomes extremely unpleasant. 18 ... ♖b7 was necessary in order to cover the sensitive c6-square, as well as the queenside generally.

19 ♖c6! ♖df6?!

This does not really help, although it was not easy to suggest a constructive plan for Black.

20 ♖e5

White's play is straightforward and easy to understand – he simply brings another piece into the important area of the board.

20 ... ♖e7 21 ♖d3!

Black's blockade of the queenside now crumbles, and the game is effectively over.

21 ... ♖e8 22 ♖xe8 ♖fxe8 23 ♖xb4 axb4 24 ♖xa8 ♖xa8 25 f3



Black resigned, as he loses trivially after 25 ... ♖c3+ 26 ♖xc3 bxc3 27 ♖xb6 ♖d7 28 ♖d6 (or 28 ♖b8+).

1-0

Elsewhere P&P rebounded from the previous day's setback with a 7-1 victory over White Rose, which was enough for them to leapfrog back above Barbican to take sole second place. They will surely be looking to go one better next season, but for another year at least the title of 4NCL Champions once again belongs to Brian Smith's WGHK.

Next month Andrew Greet will annotate his crucial game against Mickey Adams.

CHess RANTS By MIKE CUGGY

Why Can't They Get It Right?

I get a little paranoid when I see chessboards set up incorrectly in films and on the boxes of cheap sets. I watched the star-studded film *The Wild Geese* again a while back (the one in which British mercenaries are sent to an African country to free an imprisoned 'Nelson Mandela' type) and what did I see in one of the last scenes?...

...Stewart Grainger, brandy glass warming in his cupped hand, eyed his chess set and moved one of the 6 inch high pieces for all the world as if he knew what he was doing. And, yes, the board was set up with a black square in the right hand corner. If he'd really been a chess player (like Humphrey Bogart was), his professional pride wouldn't have allowed him to make the move until the board had been correctly set up.

Then, from the other side of the room with gun in hand, Richard Burton quietly announced a mate in two. Clever stuff, indeed. From his angle, he could have seen nothing of the board through the forest of horrible, non-Staunton designed pieces.

'Who cares?' 'What difference does it make?' I do. It's easy to get something right; you've just got to bother to ask someone who knows.

Next time you watch *The Great Escape* take a look at the orientation of the chess board which James Garner and Donald Pleasance are playing with.

Manufacturers of cheap chess sets go to the expense of printing their cardboard boxes...but invariably either the board is the wrong way round or the queens and kings are on the wrong squares. Am I the only nitpicker who goes loopy at this inattention to detail? Don't these guys know anything about selling? You'd think that by the law of averages they'd get it right half the time...but they don't!

I don't really know much about backgammon but, if I was going to produce a backgammon product for the mass market and was going to spend large sums of money in the process, I promise you that I'd be asking a couple of backgammon experts a lot of questions. Why? So that I got it right instead of wrong and so that I didn't lose sales by showing backgammon players that I knew nothing about their game and that I couldn't care less either! There would always be the risk that some potential buyers would buy from somewhere else. Why doesn't anyone ever take the trouble to get it right? Why did motorway service stations have thousands of milk jugs manufactured before testing one to see if the milk went in your cup or dripped off your elbow? Sorry – that's a rant for another day.

Why Do They Get It So Wrong?

I recently tried to make sense out of the following rules of the game:- You may find it hard to believe but I've faithfully copied the following extracts from the printed instructions on the back of a chess set I know is currently on sale in England. (I know because a friend with a sense of humour bought the set for me!) I shudder to think how many kids are put off learning to play chess because they were bought this set by well-meaning relatives. Any typos you spot are theirs not mine!

CHess

Lots are drawn to establish who has the red chessmen and, thus, who can move first. This player is then allowed the 16 red chess pieces and the other paver the 16 black chess pieces.

(The pieces in the set were transparent plastic and purple.)

The board is positioned so that each paver has a dark corner square on his left.

(Ok, except the board pictured on the box...yes you guessed it.)

The rooks are positioned on the two corner squares to the left and right, next to these come the two knights, one on the left and one on the right. Next to these the two bishops and, in the centre, the queen and king.

The rooks move only on the ranks and files any distance, and the bison only on the diagonals.

It is not alligator to capture your opponent. If the king is threatened check must be given (the player must saucier check). The opponent is then iodide to protect his long by moving the king to another square or moving one of his own pieces between is and the threatening piece or capturing the opposing attacker. If he is unable to make any of the above moves, the king is said to be checkmated and the game ends in favor of the opponent.

We must stall mention one pecuniary: casing. Cashing is a company move of the king and one rook (formally called castle) that may be made, if at all, only once per game. It is legal if if neither the king or the rook has yet moved. If all the squares between them on the rank are vacant and no adverse piece commands two squares nearest the king on the side on which casting is to be earned cut and if the king is not in check.

Ok – so if it was written by a well-meaning person whose first language wasn't English then I applaud the effort. I certainly wouldn't be able to write the rules of chess in any language other than my own. But couldn't someone somewhere along the production and distribution lines have checked that it made sense before producing thousands of them?

* * * *

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