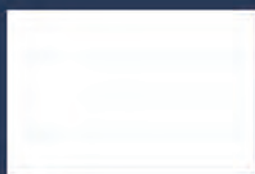


# Chess

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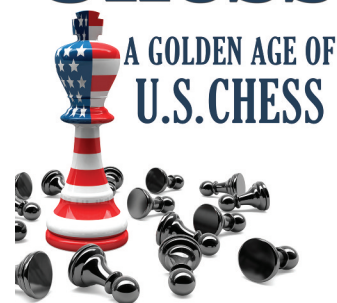
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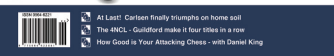
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# The Finale

All the action from a dramatic final 4NCL weekend of the season

The attention of the British chess world over the first May Bank Holiday weekend was on the Holiday Inn, Birmingham Airport as the 4NCL returned there for the final time, after some, frankly, shabby treatment from the hotel management. Would Roger Emerson's super-strong Guildford stars be able to record a fourth successive title, or would nearest challengers Cheddleton spoil the show?

Not for the first time in 4NCL history, White Rose were to rather spoil the party, to the delight of Yorkshire, if perhaps not the league and online crowd. In round 9 opponents Cheddleton found themselves with a handy rating advantage on four of the eight boards, but that wasn't to be enough. James Adair led the way for White Rose, having the better of a draw with David Howell on top board after the latter switched from his usual Berlin to defending the Keres variation of the Lopez. Perhaps Adair might even have pressed more, but a draw with Howell is never to be sniffed at and this secured the young actuarial hopeful his third GM norm in just four 4NCL seasons. Moreover, it is surely but a matter of months before James reaches 2500 and completes the title requirements.

Board 1 was the only game finished by the time control of what was to be a typically long, pivotal 4NCL match. By then Jonathan Hawkins was on course for victory after getting a little lucky in a time scramble against Peter Wells, but Hawkins' team-



GM Tamas Fodor of Cheddington

mates were not doing so well. David Eggleston appeared never to have seen the Reti before, despite its regular position at the top of our monthly chart, and was smoothly outplayed by Scottish international Iain Gourlay, while John Emms coolly defused Simon Williams' typically ambitious early double pawn sacrifice, going on to display model technique in a queen endgame. White Rose's third win, meanwhile, come courtesy of a late mating attack.

## R.Palliser-T.Fodor White Rose vs Cheddleton



On the cusp of the time control, Black has grabbed a pawn on a4, but now his king finds itself coming under a sudden assault.

**41** ♖f1 ♗e8

Likewise, if 41...♞d7 42 ♞f4 ♗a6 43 h3 when White's initiative is simply far too strong after, say, 43...gxf3 44 g4 fxf4 45 ♞xe4+ ♔g7 46 d5.

**42** ♞f4 ♞d7 **43** d5

Bagging an impressive pair of central pawns and at the board I wasn't entirely sure about 43 h3! gxf3 44 g4 ♔h7!, although then there is 45 ♔h2! fxf4 46 d5 when White should be winning.

**43...c4?**

Too slow. I had mainly been looking at 43...♗f8 44 c4 ♞e7 when 45 e6 ♞f6 46 h3! gxf3 47 g4 seemed pretty strong, and was slightly concerned by 43...e3!. Indeed, this would have been a much better try. After 44 d6 ♞e6 45 ♗e1! White is fortunate that the e-pawn is taboo, but still has much work to do after 45...b6 46 ♞xe3 a5, for instance.

**44** h3!

Finally the breakthrough occurs.

**44...gxf3 45** g4 ♗f8?

Making my life easy. Much more combative would have been 45...♔h7 46 d6 e3!, although White should be winning after 47 ♞g3! e2 48 ♗xf5 ♗e6 49 ♞xh3+ ♗h6 50 ♞e3 ♞c6 51 ♗f7+ ♔g8 52 ♗f8+! ♔xf8 53 ♞xh6+ ♔e8 54 ♞e6+ ♔d8 55 ♔f2 as Black can't quite gain enough checks.

**46** gxf5+ ♗xf5

Missing the check on f6, but if 46...♞xf5 47 ♞g3+ ♞g5 48 ♞xg5+ ♔xg5 49 ♗xf8.

**47** ♞g4+ ♗g5 **48** ♗f6 + **1-0**

With three games to go Cheddleton needed a miracle, but Colin McNab and Monicka Motycakova were to hold firm in pawn-down rook endgames against Keith Arkell and Fiona Steil-Antoni respectively, meaning that Ezra Kirk's valiant late effort in an opposite-coloured bishop ending was to be in vain.

Cheddleton wobbled a little the next day too against Barbican II. Alan Merry outplayed Simon Williams, while Kanwal Bhatia celebrated her selection for the England Women's Olympiad team with a crushing victory on bottom board, but wins on the top three and from Keith Arkell – employing a Dragon-like line of the Modern no less – saw Cheddleton get home 4½-3½.

And what of the champions? Well, Guildford began the weekend with a crushing 6-2 demolition of no less a side than Barbican, despite an early bath for Nigel Short, as we'll see later in these pages. However, they too were to wobble a little in round 10, eventually getting by old rivals Wood Green 5-3.

## J.Speelman-L.Fressinet Wood Green vs Guildford



The former Candidate had resisted

extremely well in a pretty sub-optimal position and by now it was time for Black to settle for a draw, most simply with 39...♙xe4 40 ♖xe4 ♗c6. Instead, the French no.3 was to make one winning try too many.

**39...♙g8? 40 b4!**

Even deep in a long time scramble, Speelman is extremely tactically alert.

**40...♙b5**

This loses, but Black was a goner in any case, as shown too by 40...♗d6 41 ♖c4+ ♗h8 42 ♖h3+ ♙h6 43 ♙xe5+!, 40...♗b5 41 ♖a2+, and even 40...♗xc3 41 ♖xc3 ♙xe4+ 42 ♗xe4 ♖xc3 43 ♗a8+ ♙f7 44 ♗xa6.

**41 ♗d2 1-0**

There's simply no defence to the threat of checks on d5 and h3, with 41...♗b6 42 ♙d5+ (42 ♗d5+ is even simpler) 42...♙h7 43 ♖h3+ ♙h6 cleaned up by 44 ♙e4+ ♙g7 45 ♖xh6 ♗xh6 46 ♙xe5+.

Thankfully for Guildford, Romain Edouard had outplayed Richard Pert and Jean-Pierre Le Roux out-tacticed Jacob Aagaard in the run-up to the time control, while Antoaneta Stefanova had survived a poor opening to draw against the much lower-rated if dangerous Sarah Longson (née Hegarty). In the end the match was effectively Guildford's long before Nigel Short finally ground down poor Neil McDonald in 149 moves of a rook and knight endgame.

And so to the big match. In last season's group stage Guildford had rather underestimated Cheddleton and were fortunate to edge out a very close match, but surely there would be no mistake this time around. Moreover, not only were Cheddleton out-rated by 2633 to 2448 on average, but they trailed their rivals by two match points and a whopping four board points and, to make matters even tougher, Guildford had brought in Maxime Vachier-Lagrave on top board.

There was, indeed, to be no miracle. Playing Black, Fressinet and Short didn't attempt to exploit their extra Elo points, being content to draw fairly quickly with Hawkins and Arkell respectively. Cheddleton could also be happy on top board, where David Howell held his own in a theoretical line of the Keres Lopez to draw with Vachier-Lagrave, and on board 5 where Romain Edouard found his piece sacrifice only to be good enough for a draw with David Eggleston. Moreover, Ezra Kirk appeared to be pressing as Black on board 7, but in typical fashion Nick Pert defended stoutly to hold.

That, however, was the end of the good news for the challengers. Tamas Fodor was outplayed in a highly complex middlegame by Gawain Jones, while despite throwing the kitchen sink at Jean-Pierre le Roux's Grünfeld, Simon Williams found the French GM in fine calculating form and Black's counterattack eventually carried the day.

Overall, Guildford were too strong, but kudos to Cheddleton for really making a match of it. Indeed, they once again displayed fine fighting spirit, as epitomised by captain Fiona

Steil-Antoni, who was quickly in huge trouble against Stefanova, but kept finding ways to stay on the board. Indeed, Stefanova was to badly mishandle the position and even found herself lost for a move at the time control, but eventually her extra 300 Elo points came into play, her win seeing Guildford triumph 5½-2½ to claim their fourth title in a row.

### G.Jones-T.Fodor Guildford vs Cheddleton English Opening

**1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♗f6 3 g3 d5 4 cxd5 ♗xd5 5 ♙g2 ♗b6 6 ♗f3 ♗c6 7 0-0 ♙e7 8 ♖b1 ♙e6 9 b4 e4!**

Principled, but rather provocative, not least against a well-prepared Jones.

**10 ♗xe4 ♙xa2 11 ♖a1 ♗xb4 12 ♖xa2! ♗xa2 13 ♙b2**

White is the exchange and a pawn down, but his bishop on b2 is something of a monster and that knight on a2 far from happy. All in all, the compensation appears pretty promising.

**13...♗b4**

13...0-0? 14 ♗a1 couldn't be tolerated, 13...f6? 14 ♗d4 ♗d7 15 ♗b3 ♗b4 16 ♗e6 is some knight, and even 13...f5!? 14 ♗d4!? fxe4 15 ♗e6 ♗d7 16 ♗xg7+ may well be very dangerous, extra rook or not for Black.

**14 ♙xg7 ♖g8 15 ♙a1 ♗d4d5**

Perhaps 15...♗c6 16 e3 ♗d7 was a better try, although even here after 17 ♗d4 ♗xd4 18 ♙xd4 0-0-0 19 ♗f3 White's compensation is not to be sniffed at.

**16 ♗c2 a5**



Making use of his extra pawn to establish an outpost, although even here after 17 ♗e5 White's pieces coordinate so much better than their counterparts. Jones prefers a different, also promising path.

**17 d4 ♗b4 18 ♗c1! ♗d7 19 ♗h6 ♗f8**

'You can't be mated with a knight on f8' is all well and good when one is safely castled, but here Black's king is still on its initial square. In any case, by now good advice was hard for Black to come by.

**20 ♗e5 c6 21 ♙f3 ♖a6?**

Desperate times require desperate measures, although even after 21...♖g6! 22 ♗f4! f6 23 ♗xg6 hxg6 24 ♗c5 Black remains under heavy pressure.

**22 ♙h5 ♖g6 23 ♗f4**

Strong, as was once again 23 ♙xg6 hxg6 24 ♗c5.

**23...f6 24 ♗xg6**

Regaining material parity while retaining a sizeable plus, although it must also have been tempted to keep Black tied up with 24 ♗g4!? ♗d5 25 ♗f3.

**24...hxg6 25 ♙f3 ♗e6?**

Now the white queen will return with some effect and, as such, better grovelling chances were offered by 25...♗d5.

**26 ♗h6 ♙f7 27 ♗h7+ ♗g7 28 d5!**



A gorgeous line-opener to set up White's next. **28...cxd5 29 ♗g5+! ffg5 30 ♗xg7+ ♙e8 31 ♖c1 ♗d7?**

Allowing the major pieces to pour in, but even after 31...♖c6 32 ♖d1 Black's position would have been in tatters.

**32 ♗h8+ ♙f8 33 ♗e5+! ♗e6 34 ♗b8+ ♙f7 35 ♖c8 ♙d6 36 ♗xb7+ ♙e7 37 ♖h8**

Jones wraps up a brutal display in clinical fashion. **37...♖c6 38 ♗b8! ♖c1+ 39 ♙g2 ♖xa1 40 ♖h7+ 1-0**

Resigning rather than face the humiliating 40...♙f6 41 ♗h8+ ♙f5 42 g4+ ♙f4 43 ♗d4+.

## The Race for Europe

White Rose's victory over Cheddleton appeared to give them every chance of a third-place finish and European Club Cup spot, but they were then to implode. Leading 2-0 with four to play against Guildford II, the Yorkshire side appeared to be pressing on boards 5 and 8, but blundered both away. Meanwhile in this match they couldn't, for once, hold a pawn-down rook ending, while in another rook endgame Mark Hebden somehow escaped with a draw against John Emms meaning that Guildford II somehow snatched a 4½-3½ victory from the jaws of defeat.

This season Guildford II have been less GM-laden than in previous years, a policy which has worked well and not just for captain and sponsor Roger Emerson's wallet. 15-year-old Matthew Wadsworth was one of their winners against White Rose and he was to finish the season with a first IM norm, richly deserved after scoring an undefeated 7/10. Meanwhile, only being outclassed by 2600 stars Christian Bauer and Romain Edouard, Yang-Fan Zhou went one better, the

Cambridge undergraduate's 7½/10 giving him a second GM norm.

A club with a much longer commitment to youth are Barbican and to the delight of their supremo Jonathan Rogers, his largely youthful first team finished head and shoulders ahead of the pack in third place after outclassing Blackthorne Russia 5½-2½ and White Rose 5-3 in the final rounds.

### I.Gourlay-J.Jackson

White Rose vs Barbican



#### 49...f4!

The only way to win and a real killer at that. 49...h2? 50 f8+ would have seen White escape.

#### 50 f8+

Now if 50 gxf4 h2 51 f8+ g6 52 g8+ f5 and the checks will run out.

#### 50...g6 51 a7

The black rooks go the other way after 51 fxf4 fb2, 52 xg4+ f5 53 f4+ g5 54 g7+ h6 leading to mate.

#### 51...ae2+ 52 d1 f3 53 af7 f1# 0-1

### The Battle for Survival

At the lower end of the division, Sussex Martlets and White Rose II were doomed, but which other two teams were going to join them dropping into Division Two? 3Cs were one side determined to avoid such fate and brought back their 2600+ French star for the final weekend. Christian Bauer helped them to 5-3 victories over Cambridge and South Wales Dragons respectively, although he was never to equalise in a Benko Gambit and lost against Spanish IM David Pardo as 3Cs went down 4½-3½ to Grantham Sharks in round 10.

As befits their club ethos, 3Cs have a number of young, home-grown stars, but it was a French IM who won arguably their most impressive game of the weekend.

### S.Buscara-R.Churm

3Cs vs Cambridge  
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 d6 5 f3 b6 6 d3 d7

The Milner-Barry Gambit is not without its dangers in practice, but should really be accepted.

#### 7 dxc5 xc5 8 0-0 a5 9 dbd2 a4

Fairly common, but Black may well do better with 9...f6 or 9...c7, and if 10 db3 b6.

#### 10 b4!

Seizing the initiative.

#### 10...axb3 11 xb3 a3?!

11...d7e7 12 dxc5 xc5 13 c2 gives White a pleasant edge, but better this for Black than the game.

#### 12 e3 c7 13 dbd4!



#### 13...xd4

Unfortunately for Churm, he finds himself having to iron out White's structure, as db5 was threatened and 13...dxe5? 14 dxe5 xc5 15 f5! exf5 16 d4 doesn't bear thinking about.

#### 14 cxd4 a4 15 e2 d7 16 ab1 0-0?

This runs into a vicious retreat. As such, 16...d6 was indicated followed by digging deep if needed with 17 d5 h6 18 h5 d8.

#### 17 c1! xc1?

Effectively the decisive mistake of the game, although even the silicon's suggestion of 17...c3 18 e3 h8 19 xb7 hardly looks appetising for Black.

#### 18 fxc1 d6



#### 19 hx7+!

Certainly a move one would consider, but would you have been able to calculate that it definitely works?

#### 19...hx7 20 d5+ g8

It's not too hard to work out that 20...g6 21 g4 f5 22 exf6 xf6 23 dxe6 is crushing, and 20...h6 21 c3 is also an immediate game-ender.

#### 21 h5 fb8 22 c3

Bringing another piece to the party. A different way to do things was 22 h7+ f8 23 h8+ e7 24 xg7 f8 when Black finds himself curiously helpless after 25 f4 and 26 f5.

#### 22...d7

Evidently both players spotted 22...f8 23 f3 d8 24 h8+ e7 25 xg7 e8 26 xf7! xf7 27 g8+, and here even 26...e7 27 d6+ d7 28 h6 shouldn't save Black, although this was likely a better try than the game.

#### 23 h7+

Good enough, but even more clinical, as well as pretty, would have been 23 h3! f8 24 h7+ e8 (or 24...e7 25 g5+ e8 26 f6+!) 25 f6+! gxf6 26 h8+ e7 27 xf6+ e8 28 h8#.

#### 23...f8 24 f3 d8 25 h8+ e7

#### 26 xg7 e8

Churm has done well to save f7, but is hopeless lost with his king badly exposed and dark squares too weak.

#### 27 h7! c6

This loses material, but what else to try with 28 g5+ d7 29 f6+ c7 30 c1 c2

#### 31 d2 a4 32 xc2+ d6 33 h7 1-0

The Sharks found themselves in some trouble with just three points going into the final weekend, but were another side who bolstered, bringing in three Spaniards. That helped them to safety, 6½-1½ and 5-3 victories over White Rose II and Oxford respectively, on top of their win against 3Cs, seeing them leap right up the table, aided in no small part by Peter Roberson's 3/3.

By the final round Oxford were, though, already safe, their ever-dangerous team having overcome the Martlets 6-2 and the Dragons 4½-3½. One quality which the dark-blue side certainly doesn't lack is attacking ability.

### R.Cumming-D.Martins

Sussex Martlets vs Oxford



#### 28...xc2! 29 xc2

Otherwise, the check on a3 is fatal, but now the Spanish IM forces the win having spotted a decisive backwards move with the queen.

#### 29...xa2+ 30 b1 a7 31 bxc4 a1+ 32 c2 a2+ 33 b2 xc4+ 0-1

**D.Grant-T.Eckersley-Waites**  
Sussex Martlets vs Oxford



The opening has not gone well for Black, but he can get out of the way of f4-f5 while offering some bait.

**18...g4! 19 hxg4??**

Completely missing Black's neat idea. 19 f5 xe2 (19...h4? unfortunately allows White a number of strong options, including 20 fxg6 fxg6 21 d5) 20 xe2 would have maintained control.

**19...hxg4+ 20 h4 h5!**

Suddenly White finds himself helpless against the threat to remove g3, which even happens in the event of 21 h2 or 21 e1.

**21 d5 xg3+ 22 xg3 xh4+ 23 h3 c5**

And that was pretty much game over.

**24 b4 xh3+ 25 g2 h4 26 h1**

**f6 27 fxe5 xe5 28 f4 cc3  
29 xe5+ dxe5 30 xf6 xf6 31 d5  
xc2+ 32 f2 h4 0-1**

Yet another side who strengthened in a bid to avoid the drop was Spirit of Atticus, who brought in that fervent globe-trotter Alina L'Ami on top board. The Romanian IM defeated Sam Chow in round 9, but she was to be Atticus' only winner against the Dragons, as victories for Kateryna Toma, John Cooper, Tim Kett and Sven Zeidler saw the Welsh side prevail 5½-2½ in what was to turn out to be a rather important result.

Atticus rallied as best they could, 4½-3½ victories over both the Martlets and

Cambridge propelling them up to 8 match points, but they were unable to quite catch the Dragons on board points. Against Cambridge, Atticus even won two rook endings with extra f- and h-pawns and such fighting qualities should give them every chance of a swift return to Division One. In contrast Cambridge, despite John-Paul Wallace's 101-move save against Steve Gordon, never really appeared fully at the races this season and will need to regroup in Division Two, their only victory of the final weekend a 6½-1½ demolition of the generally hapless White Rose II.



CHESSE Magazine's Carl Portman with Cheddleton captain Fiona Steil-Antoni

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**4NCL 2015/16: Championship Pool**

	Team	P	W	D	L	Points
1	Guildford	7	7	0	0	14 (40)
2	Cheddleton	7	5	0	2	10 (33)
3	Barbican 4NCL	7	5	0	2	10 (30)
4	Wood Green	7	3	1	3	7 (29)
5	White Rose	7	2	2	3	6 (26)
6	Guildford II	7	3	0	4	6 (25.5)
7	Blackthorne Russia	7	1	1	5	3 (19.5)
8	Barbican 4NCL II	7	0	0	7	0 (19.5)

**4NCL 2015/16: Demotion Pool**

	Team	P	W	D	L	Points
1	3Cs	7	5	0	2	10 (35)
2	Oxford	7	5	0	2	10 (32)
3	Grantham Sharks	7	4	1	2	9 (33)
4	South Wales Dragons	7	3	2	3	8 (29.5)
5	Spirit of Atticus	7	4	0	3	8 (27.5)
6	Cambridge University	7	3	0	4	6 (29)
7	Sussex Martlets	7	1	1	5	3 (20)
8	White Rose II	7	1	0	6	2 (18)