

Guildford's 25 Years in the 4NCL: Part III

Roger Emerson and Nigel Povah conclude their coverage of Guildford's 4NCL adventures, which saw their team go an astonishing 85 matches without defeat

Following Wood Green's retreat from the forefront of the 4NCL, Guildford's strongest challenger looked likely to be Cheddleton, headed by David Howell and Jonathan Hawkins. Indeed, our meeting in February 2015 proved to be a tense affair, which ended as a narrow victory, 4½-3½. However, it could have been a catastrophic defeat as we had substantially worse positions on several boards.

The April 2015 edition of *CHESS* covers Jean-Pierre Le Roux's lucky escape to a draw in grave time trouble after looking totally busted by move 15, as well as Mark Hebden's even luckier win after Fiona Steil-Antoni failed in severe time trouble to refute Mark's unsound queen sacrifice.

On board 5, Maxime Lagarde lost control in an unusual line against Simon Williams' King's Indian.

M.Lagarde-S.Williams

Guildford vs Cheddleton, 4NCL 2015
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♗ge2 0-0 6 ♗g3 a6 7 ♗e2 c5 8 dxc5 dxc5 9 e5 ♖xd1+ 10 ♗xd1 ♗fd7 11 f4 ♗c6 12 ♗ge4 f6 13 exf6 exf6 14 ♗d6 ♗d8 15 ♗d5 f5 16 0-0



Instead, against 16 ♗c7, Simon had no doubt planned 16...♗f6! 17 ♗xa8 ♗xd6 18 ♗c7 ♗b4 19 0-0 ♗e4 when all Black's pieces are very active. Maxime should probably have played 16 ♗e3 ♗xb2 17 ♗b1 ♗d4 18 ♗f2, keeping his centralised knights

while developing his queenside pieces. The pawn sacrifice is only temporary.

16...♗f6 17 ♗xc8 ♗axc8 18 ♗f3 ♗e8 19 ♗e3 ♗e4 20 ♗ad1 ♗d4 21 ♗h1 b5 22 cxb5 axb5 23 b4 ♗xf3 24 gxf3 ♗c3 25 ♗xc3 ♗xe3



This was beginning to look rather dangerous for us, but Maxime defended coolly.



Antoaneta Stefanova always battled hard for Guildford, not least against Hamitevici.

26 ♗d5 ♗e6 27 bxc5 ♗xc5 28 ♗f2 ♗c4 29 ♗fd2 ♗h6 30 ♗g2 ♗f7

30...♗f8 followed by 31...b4 was probably stronger, but, getting short of time, Simon was happy to take the draw – particularly in view of the position on board 7 where Ety Stefanova was in some trouble.

31 ♗b1 ♗xf4 ½-½

A.Stefanova-V.Hamitevici

Guildford vs Cheddleton, 4NCL 2015
Sicilian Defence

1 ♗f3 c5 2 b3 g6 3 ♗b2 ♗f6 4 e4 ♗g7 5 ♗d3 ♗c6 6 0-0 0-0 7 ♗e1 d5 8 exd5 ♗xd5 9 ♗xg7 ♗xg7 10 ♗b5 ♗d4 11 ♗xd4 cxd4 12 ♗e2 e6 13 c3 ♗f6 14 cxd4 a6 15 ♗c4 ♗b4 16 ♗e4 ♗d8 17 ♗c3 ♗xd4 18 ♗b1



Ety's offbeat opening has gone horribly wrong. Now 18...b5 would maintain a winning advantage, in view of 19 ♗f1 ♗b7 20 ♗e4 ♗xe4 21 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 22 ♗xe4 ♗xa1 23 ♗xa8 ♗xa2 and 19 ♗e4 ♗f4 20 g3 ♗f5 21 ♗f1 ♗b7, with a huge bind on the position. Instead, Hamitevici's retreat allows Ety to just about stay in the game.

18...♗d8 19 ♗e3 b5 20 ♗e2 ♗b7 21 a3 ♗d5 22 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 23 ♗a2 ♗c8 24 h3

Ety was already short of time. 24 b4 was better.

24...♗f5 25 f3

25 ♗a1! and if 25...♗xf2 26 ♗f3 was a neat way of relieving pressure.

25...♗fc5 26 ♗b2 ♗xb2 27 ♗xb2 ♗c2 28 ♗xc2 ♗xc2 29 d4 ♗a2 30 b4



30...g5

Black could have waited to take the d-pawn: 30...g5! followed by 31...d5 cements Black's position in the centre and keeps White's pieces tied down.

31 f2 fxd4 32 f3 fxd7 33 e3 f5 34 h4 f6 35 g3 h6 36 c1 h7 37 c5 d7 38 c1 e5 39 c5+ d6 40 a4 bxa4 41 a5 g5 ½-½

Ten moves too late! White will be able to capture both black a-pawns, so following the time scramble the players agreed a draw.

After recovery from his operation, Nigel Povah was back jointly running the squad by late 2014. Typically during these 4NCL weekends Nigel preferred to play, with reasonable success, and then host second and third team meals in the hotel, while Roger acted as organiser and chauffeur for first team players, hosting a dinner in some nearby inn.

This meant that Nigel didn't suffer the anguish of following such matches as the one against Cheddleton, either in the playing hall or online from a laptop in the hotel bar. For this match, Roger took Brian Smith's advice a step further than his mantra 'Never enter the playing hall during the first session!' and went for a long walk outside, only returning after

the first time-control had been reached – one of Roger's best ever moves in the 4NCL.

After somehow avoiding disaster, Guildford I had a relatively trouble-free run to the title in 2014-15, while our second team surpassed themselves by managing to snatch second place after Cheddleton dropped three points in the final weekend. The next two seasons, 2015-16 and 2016-17, were again relatively trouble free for our first team, as our strongest challengers Cheddleton had again dropped enough match points in the first ten rounds for us to be assured of the title with a round to spare.

There were individual successes for our younger players. Matthew Wadsworth, at age 15, got his first IM norm. First, Matthew took advantage of some injudicious pawn moves by his opponent:

M.Wadsworth-G.O'Toole Guildford II vs Barbican II, 4NCL 2016



21...d4 22 f3 c5 23 fxd4 b6 24 f2 fxd1+ 25 fxd1 fxf3+ 26 fxf3 e6 27 b3 a5 28 g3 f5 29 exf6 fxf6 30 f5 e8 31 f6 f8 32 d5 g7 33 f6 h6 34 f7 g5 35 fxf6 g5 36 e5+ g7 37 f8 g# 1-0

A further win against Iain Gourlay the following day ensured that Matthew reached his target with an undefeated 7/10, and further norms in the next couple of years enabled him to claim the IM title.

Meanwhile Yang-Fan Zhou secured his second GM norm, with some fine wins.

Y.F.Zhou-S.Ansell Guildford II vs Cheddleton, 4NCL 2016



33 fxd7!

A little combination to win a pawn.

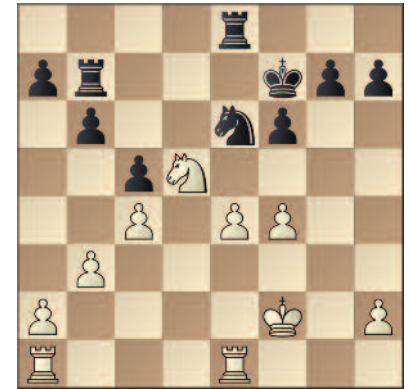
33...f7 34 b6 fdd8 35 fxc8 fxc8 36 g5

Yang-Fan follows up accurately, fixing Black's kingside pawns and paving the way for clearing the second rank to allow f2.

36...f7 37 f2 d3 f2c5 38 f4 e7 39 fxc5+ fxc5 40 e3 e5 41 g3 fd6 42 f2 f2c8 43 fd2 f2e6 44 f2c3 f2c8 45 f2h7 e4 46 f2e2 f2c5 47 g4 f2f8 48 f2h6 f2g8 49 f5 gxf5 50 gxf5 fd7 51 g6 f2g6 52 f2g6 f2e8 53 f2h5+ fd6 54 c5+ f2c7 55 f2h7+ 1-0

In 2016/17 it was the turn of Daniel Fernandez to shine, obtaining the third norm needed for him to become a GM. The August 2017 edition of *CHESSE* gives Daniel's win against GM Neil McDonald. Here's another, showing Daniel's seeming knack of lulling opponents into playing poorly.

D.Fernandez-M.Gantner Guildford vs White Rose, 4NCL 2017



Daniel now brings his king up to support his central pawns, provoking Black into weakening his kingside structure.

30 e3 g5?! 31 fxf6 fxf6 32 d3 f2e6? 33 f2e3!

Stopping Black from re-routing his knight to e5 via f3.

33...h6 34 f2g1 f2f8

Realising too late the need for his knight to get to e5.

35 h4

Suddenly White has a winning infiltration.

35...f7 36 f2g3 f2e5+ 37 f2c3 f2h7 38 f2g8+ f2f7 39 f2a8 f2c6 40 f2g8 f2xe4 41 f2af8+ f2e6 42 f2xf6 f2e2 43 f2hx7 1-0

In our final match of 2016/17, a 6½-1½ victory over Cheddleton, Matthew Sadler had a fine win over the dangerous Ivan Sokolov. That game featured in the July 2017 edition of *CHESSE* and showed Matthew's deep knowledge and understanding of opening theory. We'd like to show two other examples of this, which also demonstrate Matthew's determination, fearlessness and love of a challenge.

When Guildford's first and second teams clashed in March 2014, Matthew was happy

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There have been some big last round clashes in the 4NCL, not least the Guildford-Wood Green match of May 2013 (see pages 22 and 23 of our October issue), which saw Matthew Sadler hold as Black against Vasyil Ivanchuk. Roger Emerson and Luke McShane look on.

to take on Dave Smerdon in Dave's own pet line of the Milner-Barry Gambit, with which he'd nearly beaten Jan Timman.

D.Smerdon-M.Sadler
 Guildford II vs Guildford I, 4NCL 2014
 French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 ♖b6 5 ♜f3 ♜c6 6 ♙d3 cxd4 7 cxd4 ♙d7 8 0-0 ♜xd4 9 ♜bd2!?

Dave Smerdon's favourite wrinkle.
9...♙c5 10 ♜xd4 ♙xd4 11 ♜f3 ♜e7 12 ♜xd4 ♖xd4 13 ♙e1 b6!

Timman played 13...♙c6 14 ♙e3 ♖xe5 15 ♙c5 ♖g5 and ended up slightly hanging on for a draw.
14 ♙e3 ♖xb2 15 ♖g4 ♜g6



The point of Matthew's line is revealed: 13...b6 allows the black queen to stay on the long diagonal, without allowing a white rook to infiltrate to b7. Now 16 h4 can be met by 16...♜xe5 because of 17 ♖xg7? ♜f3+.

16 ♙ab1 ♖c3 17 ♙f1 0-0
 White is now just two pawns down without any attack.
18 ♙d4 ♖c2 19 ♙b3 ♙ac8 20 ♙h3 ♖d2 21 ♙d1 ♖f4 22 ♙h5 h6 23 ♙e3 ♖xe5

24 ♖f3 ♙a4 25 ♙d4 ♙c2 26 ♙h5 f5 27 ♖h3 ♙c3 28 ♙d2 ♙e4 29 g4 ♖f6 0-1

Roger met Dave coming out of the playing hall, looking shell-shocked. Dave moaned that "He played a move my engine thought was third-best!"

Here is another fine example, this time from four years later.

F.Libiszewski-M.Sadler
 3Cs vs Guildford, 4NCL 2018
 French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜d2 ♙e7 4 ♜gf3 ♜f6 5 e5 ♜fd7 6 ♙d3 c5 7 c3 ♜c6 8 0-0 g5 9 dxc5 ♜dx5 10 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 11 ♜b3 ♜xd3 12 ♖xd3 f6!?

More usual is 10...g4.



Here is Matthew's innovation. The 'book' move is 12...e5 which doesn't have a good score at all for Black.

13 f4 gxf4 14 ♙xf4 e5 15 ♙h6
 After 15 ♖g3!? exf4 16 ♖g7 ♙f8 17 ♜d4 Black is somewhat tied up, but without White seeming to have a knockout punch. Nevertheless, it takes nerves of steel and a good memory for your home analysis to play

like this.

15...♙g8 16 ♖xh7 ♙e6 17 ♙g7?

White is a pawn ahead. but already it was time to retreat: 17 ♙e3 ♖d7 18 ♙f2 was called for.

17...♖d7 18 ♙h1?



A fresh blunder. White was maybe expecting 18 0-0-0, but instead Matthew plays...

18...♙d8!

...And the bishop on g7 is trapped.
19 ♖g6+ ♙f7 20 ♖g3 ♙e7 21 ♜a5 b6 22 cxb6 axb6 23 ♜b3 ♙a4 24 h3 ♙e4 25 a4 d4 26 cxd4 ♖d5 27 a5 ♖xb3 28 ♖xb3 ♙xb3 29 dxe5 fxe5 30 axb6 ♙xg7 31 b7 ♙d6 32 ♙a8+ ♙e7 0-1

Neil McDonald sought to improve on White's play in the final weekend of the 2017/18 season, and was successful, up to a point. On page 18 of the June 2018 edition of CHESS Jonathan Rogers showed how Matthew outplayed his GM opponent to win in 52 moves, as Guildford I moved steadily to a sixth title in a row, again securing the title with a round to spare.

2018/19

The following season saw two significant changes. Firstly, Manx Liberty (made up of a nucleus of central European players in the former Bundesliga side S.G. Trier) had come through the divisions to challenge for the title. Secondly, Brexit had added uncertainty to the future participation of overseas players. In response, Nigel and Roger recruited England internationals Mickey Adams and Luke McShane, and reached agreement with Hou Yifan (studying for a year at Oxford) to appear in the final weekend. At the same time we hired Lizzy Paetz as our main first team female player to fill the gap left by new mother Ety Stefanova.

Lizzy had a solid, unbeaten season – as did most of the squad – with a 2500+ performance, but the star turn was again Matthew Wadsworth who racked up a 2600+ rated score of 7/9. The season finale again proved an anti-climax to those hoping for an upset, because White Rose again scored an upset of their own by beating Manx Liberty 4½-3½. Even so, we wanted to put down a marker for battles to come, so Guildford I were out for blood in the final match.

On the first two boards Matthew Sadler and Constantin Lupulescu, as Black, neutralised Richard Rapport and Mickey Adams. Meanwhile, on board 3, fireworks started to fly.

D.Fridman-L.McShane

Manx Liberty vs Guildford, 4NCL 2019
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♗f3 g6 3 g3 ♖g7 4 ♗g2 0-0
5 0-0 d6 6 c4 ♗bd7 7 ♗c3 e5 8 e4 c6
9 h3 ♖a5 10 ♖e2

Fridman deviates from the normal 10 ♖e1, against which Luke had another complex win, over David Howell in December 2017.

10...exd4 11 ♗xd4 ♖e8 12 ♗d1 ♗b6 13 ♖d3 ♖d7 14 ♖f4 ♖ad8 15 ♖xd6 ♖xh3



The tactics kick off.

16 c5 ♖xg2 17 ♗b3 ♖b4 18 cxb6 ♖xe4
19 ♖xb4 ♖xd3 20 bxa7 ♖f5 21 ♖xd8
♖xd8 22 ♖d6?!

After a flurry of tactics, the position has clarified, but this attempt seems too ambitious. Instead 22 ♖c5 would ensure retention of the advanced a-pawn, giving White a continuing slight advantage.

22...♖a8 23 ♖b8 ♗d7 24 ♗d1 ♖f6 25 ♗e4 ♖e7



26 ♖d6

If instead 26 ♗d6 ♖g4 27 ♖e1 ♖e6 28 ♗xb7 ♗xb8 29 axb8 ♖+ ♖xb8 30 ♗7a5 when Black has the two bishops and the white knights are vulnerable.

26...♖f8 27 ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 28 ♗d6 ♖g4
29 ♗d4 ♗e5 30 ♖g2 ♖xa7 31 ♖xg4 ♖xd6

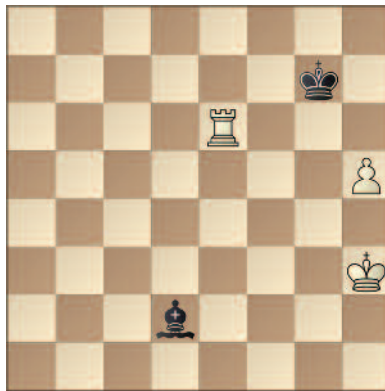
Avoiding a last trick in 31...♗xg4?? 32 ♗c8+.
32 ♗d4+ ♖e7

Black has won a crucial pawn. Fridman put up stiff resistance, but Luke eventually won on move 102!

On board 6, Romain won an ending straight out of his *Chess Calculation Training* series of books:

R.Edouard-V.Erdos

Guildford vs Manx Liberty, 4NCL 2019



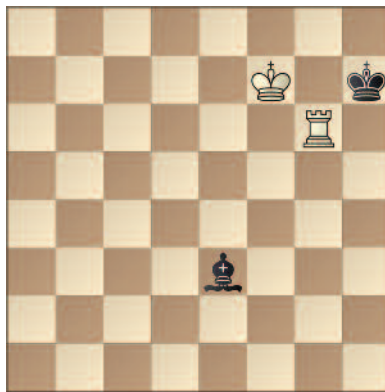
56 ♖g4 ♖c1 57 ♖f5 ♖d2 58 ♖g6+ ♖h7
59 h6! ♖c1

If 59...♖xh6 60 ♖f6 ♖e3 61 ♖f7 and now Black must lose his bishop or allow mate, as in the game.

60 ♖g7+ ♖xh6 61 ♖g6+ ♖h7

If 61...♖h5 62 ♖g1 and wins.

62 ♖f6 ♖e3 63 ♖f7



63...♖a7 64 ♖a6 ♖b8 65 ♖a8 ♖c7 66 ♖c8 ♖f4

Or 66...♖b6 67 ♖c1!.

67 ♖c4 ♖g5 68 ♖c3! 1-0

The bishop now blocks the black king's escape square.

Our seventh title in a row gave Guildford a total of ten championships, and we were on course for another in 2019/20 before COVID-19 changed so many things in the chess world.

The past twenty-five years have seen us help to launch the careers of David Howell, Matthew Wadsworth, Akshaya Kalaiyalahan, Alex Golding, Viktor Stoyanov and others who we hope will continue to climb the chess world in the future. We have helped a number of players to reach GM and IM titles.

We have also had the pleasure of hosting the entire England team, several established superstars – world champions Hou Yifan and Etym Stefanova, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Anish Giri, Peter Svidler and Pentala Harikrishna, for example – and some potential superstars of the future in the likes of David Anton and Jorden van Foreest. Most importantly, we have introduced a generation of young French grandmasters to the English Sunday roast, including parsnips – which only Jean-Pierre Le Roux could name, as apparently the French only feed them to horses.

Over the years, many Guildford players have had lost positions, but they have rarely ended up losing – and it's this fighting spirit, embraced by all, which has created our run of success. To exemplify that, we'll show just one example. Akshaya Kalaiyalahan had been outplayed positionally by John Cox, so with little time on the clock swindling mode was required.

A.Kalaiyalahan-J.Cox

Guildford II vs Barbican, 4NCL 2016



29 ♖e6 ♗f6

29...fxe6 30 dxe6 ♗f6 is fine for Black, but he decides he doesn't need to risk it.

30 ♖xf7! e4?

Already Black needs to take care. 30...♖a1 31 ♖g5 ♖xf1+ 32 ♖xf1 ♗e4 33 ♖e7 ♖d8 would stabilise the position.

31 ♖xf6! ♖xf6 32 ♖e6?

32 ♖h6! was actually the correct move, but who's to argue with results?

32...g5??

The losing move. 32...♖g7 was required. Now Akshaya makes no mistake.

33 h4! h6 34 ♖c3+ ♖g6 35 h5+ ♖h7

Or if 35...♖xh5 36 ♖f6.

36 ♖f6 ♖c7 37 ♖g6+ ♖h8 38 ♖f7 1-0

Taking our lesson from that and from the sight of too many sportsmen staying on too long, we have decided to retire at the top. So the Guildford I name is retired, following an unbeaten run of 85 matches in the 4NCL. Guildford's 4NCL teams for the coming season will be built around our successful Young Guns, Gatekeepers and Castles teams in the ever-growing 4NCL Online. We would like to thank all our players for their part in Guildford's 4NCL success over the past 25 years, and we wish them and the 4NCL as a whole every success in the future.