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*Wishing All Our Readers a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year*



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- ★ *Christmas Quiz* by Steve Giddins
- ★ *Interview: Magnus Carlsen*
- ★ *2011 European Team Championships* by GM Nick Pert

Chess

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New Season, Same-old 4NCL?

Richard Palliser isn't so sure as he reports from the opening weekend of the British Team League

IT'S BEEN A fair few years since I penned a column on the 4NCL, during which much has changed with the British Team League. As has long been the case, there are no Scottish or Irish teams, but the overall scale is nowadays staggering. Both Divisions One and Two boast sixteen eight-player teams, and Division Three has expanded to include no fewer than forty-three six-player sides! Huge credit must go to the 4NCL board for allowing pretty much any chess club or local group of players to enjoy a weekend away with a couple of seven-hour matches. Based on how many sides seem to enjoy their weekends playing in a hotel, Division Three has become a major success in terms of numbers and finance, with the e2e4 congresses subsequently getting in on the act of offering chess away from a draughty school or church hall.

Huge expansion has been considered a success by many, but maybe now is the time for the 4NCL to remember that it was founded to promote high-level chess in the country and to return to doing its best to help make Division One as strong and competitive as possible. This won't be easy in the current economic climate and many teams are still fielding at least a couple of titled players thanks to private sponsors (usually other players), but is the two-group format really required for an exciting Division One? It's not hard to see that if one removed the weakest four sides, there would be even more close matches and, no less importantly, fewer complete mismatches.

The Northern League (part of Division Three) is now in its second season, but only boasts a miserable six teams. As such, it's hard to see it running next season, that is unless the board do something radical, perhaps splitting the whole league from Division Two downwards into North (likely to be the midlands and north in reality) and South. After all, regionalisation outside the top tier has never harmed the Bundesliga. One bonus of such an approach would be that the 4NCL could move away from



Photo: John Saunders

Gawain Jones, hotfoot from the European Championship - and in hot form!

Hinckley Island, a gigantic motel surrounded by traffic and home to three of the five league weekends this season. Hinckley is undoubtedly well located for those coming by car and, crucially, can host all three divisions, but I'm yet to hear any praise of, for instance, the playing conditions – in general two huge halls, solely lit by artificial light and prone to being rather hot, not to mention vulnerable to noise from the kitchens!

Anyhow, enough of the strong position the 4NCL finds itself in at the start of the 2011/12 season, as well as the challenges currently facing its organisers and captains; it's really time we covered some of the action.

Division One, Pool B

Arriving at Staverton Park, Daventry, my White Rose teammates were rather surprised to realise that we were the top seeds in this group. Yes, we had enjoyed an amazing time last season to finish third overall and qualify for the European Club Cup (see Sam Collins' report in the November issue), but number one in the pool ahead of Cheddleton, Barbican and

Wood Green II with their ranks of titled players? I'll just be happy if White Rose avoid the relegation group when the league divides in two after seven rounds, but we did get off to a good start, edging past newly-promoted and beefed-up Jutes of Kent. Gawain Jones has been in fine form of late, finishing second in the strong Corsican Open ahead of racking up a 2700 performance for England in the European Team Championship, which may explain why Simon Williams decided to mix it up from move two. Gawain, however, is more than happy with a messy, typically 'English' chess struggle:

*Round 1, Jutes of Kent - White Rose
S.Williams - G.Jones
Caro-Kann*

1 e4 c6 No Dragon today! The Caro strikes me as a good choice against the highly-aggressive and ever-dangerous Williams, and Gawain was actually hoping for White's next move... **2 ♟c4!?** The so-called 'Hillbilly Attack' on which Simon has previously written an article. It's not without some punch, but whether it was really such a good choice against 2600+ opposition I'm somewhat less sure. **2...d5 3 ♟b3 dxe4 4 ♞h5 g6!** Simplest and best. **5 ♞h4 ♟g7 6 ♜c3 a5!**



A novelty according to my database and a move which Gawain had spent just a couple of minutes on in his preparation – long enough, however, to be convinced of the move's merits. **7 ♜xe4?!** This cannot be right. Gawain had only considered advances of the a-pawn here,

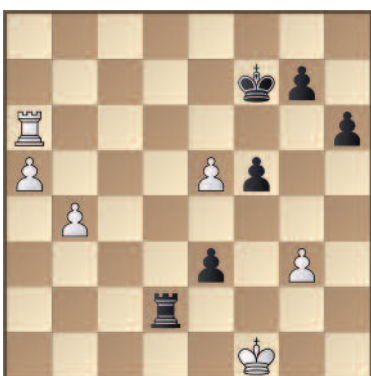
but after, say, 7 a4 ♖a6 8 ♜xe4 ♜f6 one would surely prefer to play Black as White's pieces are being buffeted around. White would prefer not to lose time with his queen, but if the Hillbilly is to remain a viable sideline, perhaps 7 ♛xe4! has to be tried. After 7...♜f6 8 ♛h4 b5 9 a3 White is still very much on the board, although 8...♜a6! could be more problematic, focusing on c2 in the event of 9 d4 ♙f5. **7...a4 8 ♙c4 b5!** Waiting for an even better moment to push the a-pawn and driving the bishop back, whereas 8...a3 9 c3 might not have been so bad for White. **9 ♙e2 ♜h6 10 g4?** And this is truly disgusting. 10 ♜f3 had to be played, even if Black enjoys the initiative and a pleasant advantage after 10...♜f5 11 ♛f4 ♜a6 12 a3 ♜c7. Rather than allow Black to take control of the position, Williams hopes to battle for the initiative, but a nasty surprise lay in store for him. **10...a3 11 ♛b1?** It really wasn't poor Simon's day. 11 c3 had to be tried, even if Black would have been doing pretty well after 11...♛d5 12 ♜g3 ♛a4, but not 12...axb2 13 ♙xb2 ♛xa2? on account of 14 c4!. **11...♛d5**



Ouch. Suddenly White can't defend both rooks. **12 ♜c3 ♛xh1 13 ♙f1 ♙e5** The queen won't be trapped and, a rook ahead, Black now wrapped things up without difficulty. **14 ♙f3 ♛xh2 15 ♜h3 ♜xg4! 16 ♙xg4 ♙f6 0-1**

Elsewhere York University student James Adair won an instructive ending to seal the match 4½-3½.

Round 1, Jutes of Kent - White Rose
J.Naylor - J.Adair



James Adair: White Rose's secret weapon

A lively time scramble had led to this unbalanced ending. White's queenside passers look dangerous, but Black is not without his trumps too. The crowd wondered if Adair might go 43...♛f2+ 44 ♙e1 g5 45 ♙xh6 f4 26 gxf4 gxf4 with excellent chances to draw thanks to Black's advanced pair of passed pawns, but he found something even stronger. **43...h5! 44 ♛b6?** A rather lazy move which badly underestimates the danger. White had to avoid 44 ♙d6? f4! 45 gxf4 h4 when the h-pawn decides; and the active attempt 44 e6+ would not have been an easy draw in view of 44...♙e7! (after 44...♙f6 45 ♛a8 ♙xe6 46 a6 ♛a2 47 b5 h4 48 gxf4 f4 49 b6, White's pawns arrive in time) 45 ♛a7+ (45 b5? h4 46 gxf4 f4 47 ♛a7+ ♙xe6 48 ♛a8 ♙f5 does the business for Black) 45...♙xe6. It seems White must play 46 ♛a8! since 46 ♙xg7 h4 47 a6 ♛f2+ 48 ♙e1 ♛a2 49 b5 hxg3 50 ♙xg3 f4 51 ♙g8 ♙d5 is again winning for Black thanks to his much more active king. However, the easiest way to draw the game was to activate the rook with 44 ♛c6!. Then 44...h4 (the second player might prefer 44...f4!?, although after 45 gxf4 h4 46 a6 h3 47 a7 ♛a2 - and not 47...h2?? 48 ♛c7+ ♙g6 49 a8♙ when the newly promoted queen covers h1 - 48 ♛c2! ♛xa7 49 ♙e2 h2 50 ♛c1, it's just a draw from what I can see) 45 gxf4 f4 46 ♛c3 halts the pawns, prepares ♛a3 and doesn't seem to give Black anything. **44...h4!** There's no defence. Black's pawns will arrive first. **45 ♛b7+ ♙e6 0-1** There's clearly no point in waiting to see 46 ♙xg7 h3 47 ♛h7 h2 or 46 gxf4 f4 47 a6 f3.

Come the Sunday round and White Rose could again be happy that last year's champions Pride & Prejudice had folded, allowing them to re-sign the Keighley-born Jones who impressively destroyed that most solid of grandmasters, Bogdan

Lalic, a man whom it was rumoured had previously gone a most impressive 150 games without defeat. Despite that and my win over Lawrence Trent, the match was very close, as Peter Sowray had scored a crushing early win for Wood Green II. In the end, however, Wood Green Hillsmark supremo Brian Smith lost on time on bottom board and I'm afraid I have to relay that our magazine's Executive Editor lost his way in a highly promising position against the tricky Adair, leaving the Yorkshire side to take the spoils 5-3.

Round 2, Wood Green II - White Rose
P.Sowray - S.Buckley

Pirc Defence

1 d4 d6 2 e4 ♜f6 3 ♜c3 g6 4 f4 ♙g7 5 ♜f3 0-0 The main alternative is 5...c5 as occurred on an adjacent board in Adair-Pein. There White came prepared with an idea from Andrew Greet's excellent new work *Beating Unusual Chess Defences: 1 e4* and after 6 dxc5 ♛a5 7 ♛d4! dxc5 8 ♛c4 0-0 9 e5 ♙e6 10 ♛a4 (Greet prefers 10 ♛b5!) 10...♙xa4 11 ♜xa4 ♜fd7 12 ♙e3 ♛c8 (12...♜c6!? is also quite critical) 13 ♜g5 ♙f5 14 ♙c4 e6 15 0-0-0 h6 16 ♜f3 ♜b6! 17 ♜xb6 axb6, chances were about equal. **6 ♙d3 ♜fd7?!** Not without good reason does one not find this slow retreat in James Vigus' bible *The Pirc in Black and White*. Black's usual moves are 6...♜a6 and 6...♜c6, supporting ...c5 and ...e5 breaks respectively. **7 0-0 c5** The absence of the knight from the kingside would also have been felt after 7...e5 8 dxe5 dxe5 9 f5!, as in Fischer-Jovanovic, Vinkovci 1968. **8 d5**



8...♜b6 This seems as good a try as anything. Instead 8...e6 9 dxe6 fxe6 10 ♜g5 ♜b6 11 a4! saw White seizing a strong initiative in Fischer-Domnitz, Netanya 1968. The 11th World Champion was certainly pretty lucky to face this dubious sideline on more than one occasion! **9 f5!** Sowray is unafraid to sacrifice a pawn or two to launch an attack. **9...c4 10 ♙e2 gxf5?** Perhaps shocked by his opponent's play, Buckley panics or feels his position was already so grim that he might as well take some

material for his suffering. That's sometimes fair enough, but here Black really had to dig in with 10...♟d7, unpleasant though his position is. 11 ♖e1 The queen will soon wreak havoc on the kingside. 11...fxe4 12 ♖g3! ♟f5 Plugging the g-file with the bishop is the only try: 12...♟h8 13 ♟g5 f5 failing to 14 ♖h4 h6 15 ♟gxe4! fxe4 16 ♟xh6 ♟d7 17 ♟g5+ ♟g8 18 ♟xe7 when White crashes through. 13 ♟g5 ♟g6 14 h4!



14...e5? Black won't survive on the kingside after this. White would have enjoyed a strong attack after 14...h5 15 ♟xf7 ♟xf7 16 ♖xg6 or 14...♟e5 15 ♟f4 ♟d4+ 16 ♟h1, but Black had to try one of these. 15 h5 h6 The point of Black's play, but Sowray has realised that the following forcing sequence is somewhat in White's favour: 16 hxg6 hxg5 17 gxf7+ ♟xf7 18 ♟xf7 ♟xf7 19 ♟xg5 1-0 Resignation may seem a tad early but, after 19...♟f6 20 ♟f1 ♟d7 21 ♟h5+ ♟f8 22 ♖g4 or 19...♖h8 20 ♟xe4 ♟d7 21 ♟xd6+ ♟g8 22 ♟g4, Black's days would have been numbered.

Cheddleton, clear favourites in Pool B and one of only two sides who might challenge Wood Green Hillsmark I for the league, have added Mark Hebden to their ranks and began their campaign by thumping bottom side Guildford II 6-2, Danny Gormally, Jonathan Hawkins, Keith Arkell, Robert Bellin and Jason McKenna all winning.

Sunday matches always see seeded sides clashing and Cheddleton against Barbican had all the makings of a close encounter. For the leading amateur side Lorin D'Costa cashed in his rating advantage on board seven and Ingrid Lauterbach defeated McKenna on eight, but Cheddleton still triumphed overall 4½-3½ after John Cox's Petroff quickly ran into trouble, while Matthew Turner and Jonathan Rogers were outplayed by Hawkins and Bellin respectively.

The previous day things had gone much better for Barbican as they overcame Cambridge 5½-2½ before the university side bounced back, narrowly overcoming Guildford II 4½-3½. And what of the side

representing the country's other leading university, I hear you ask? Well, Oxford, relieved from relegation after the demise of Pride & Prejudice, began with a 4-3½ victory over Wood Green II. A strange scoreline you might think, and it is, but the London-based side had defaulted a board (Sarah Hegarty was



Lawrence Trent: cry me a river...

still returning from the European Team Championship), which equates to a half-point penalty. Thus 4-4 became 4-3½, although Wood Green would have triumphed but for a late tragicomedy.

Round 1, Wood Green II - Oxford L.Trent - M.Rose

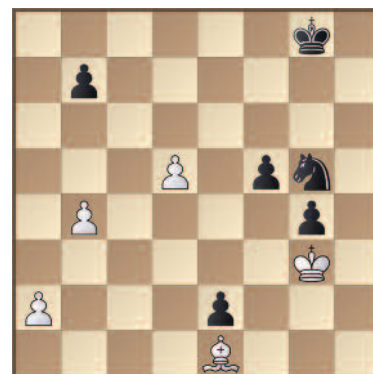


White has just pushed his a-pawn and now Rose tried a final throw of the dice: 72...bxc3 73 bxc3?? Oops! I'm sure we've all suffered that sinking feeling at some point, realising too late that the opponent no longer has any moves apart from with one piece which they're about to sacrifice for stalemate. Instead, 73 a7 would have won straightforwardly after 73...♖g5+ (or 73...♖b1+ 74 ♟h2 ♖a1 75 ♖b8+) 74 ♖g3 ♖xg3+ 75 fxg3 ♟b7 76 bxc3. 73...♖b1+ 74 ♟h2 ♖g1+! ½-½

Wrapping up coverage of Pool B, I

should mention that Jutes proved too strong for Oxford in round two despite the up-and-coming junior Marcus Harvey taking the scalp of Simon Williams on top board. The Kent-based side triumphed 5-3, with perhaps the most interesting game being on board four.

Round 2, Jutes of Kent - Oxford Bj.Thorfinnsson - T.Eckersley-Waites



One's first thought is that Black is winning easily thanks to his active knight and kingside pawns, but all is not as it seems. 45 a4! Passed pawns and potential passed pawns must be pushed! 45...♟f3 Despite the defensively-placed bishop, White also seems to have enough to draw after 45...♟e4+!? 46 ♟f4 ♟f7 47 b5 ♟d6 48 b6. 46 ♟f2 ♟f7 47 b5 ♟d4 By now it should be clear that Black isn't better, and perhaps bringing the knight back with 47...f4 48 ♟xe2 ♟e7 49 ♟b4+ ♟d7 50 ♟c5 ♟e5 was the easiest way to draw. 48 ♟c3 Now Black even seems to be in some trouble, but White has a keen tactical eye. The Oxford man now found a neat piece sacrifice. 48...g3+! 49 ♟xg3 ♟e7 50 ♟f2 ♟xb5! 51 axb5 ♟d6 52 b6 ♟xd5 53 ♟f6 ♟c6 54 ♟d8 ♟d7 55 ♟c7 ♟c8 The point of Black's play. There's no way in for White's king and the position is just a draw despite what your misguided engine might try to claim. 56 ♟xe2 ♟d7 57 ♟f3 f4 58 ♟xf4 ♟c8 59 ♟e5 ♟d7 60 ♟d5 ♟c8 ½-½

Division One, Pool A

As regular readers of this magazine will be aware, in the absence of Pride & Prejudice, Wood Green Hillsmark I are clear favourites to win the league. However, their first team got off to quite a shaky start, only managing 5-3 against newly-promoted Anglian Avengers. Jonathan Rowson, Jon Speelman, Bogdan Lalic and Chris Ward all had convincing wins, but both David Spence and Alan Merry overturned a 300+ point rating disadvantage to shock Stephen Gordon and Neil McDonald respectively. Neither were WGH I at their fluent best the next day, but a strong performance from Jonathan Rowson on top board helped them to a 5½-2½ victory over e2e4.org.uk.

Round 2, Wood Green I - e2e4.org.uk
A.Slavin - J.Rowson



White's pressure against g6 looks ominous, but Rowson had matters in hand. **22...♖a6!** **23 ♗xa6 ♜xa6** This in combination with Black's next looks good, but does allow an unexpected combination. As such, Black might have considered 23...bxa6!? **24 ♜xh5 ♜e4+** **25 ♖a1 ♖b8**, with more than enough for the exchange in view of White's weak pawns and king position. **24 ♜xh5 ♗f6** **25 ♜g4?** As he showed at the European Club Cup, where he drew an exciting tussle with no less a player than Smirin, Slavin is a pretty dangerous opponent, but here he falters and allows Black to seize a strong initiative. White really needed to find **25 ♗d6!** and after **25...♜b5+!**? (avoiding the draw which arises after **25...♜xd6** **26 ♜xg6+!** **fxg6** **27 ♜xg6+** as the black bishop is now pinned) **26 ♖c1 ♗g7** **27 ♜g4** both players have attacking chances. **25...e4!** The long diagonal clears and it becomes obvious that White faces an unpleasant defensive task. **26 ♜xe4 ♗xc3** **27 ♖c2 ♗d4** **28 ♖d5 ♜f6** **29 h5??** Too optimistic. White had to cover f2, although after **29 ♗d2 ♖e8** **30 h5 ♖e5** **31 ♜xb7 ♜xh5** Black would have excellent play for the exchange. **29...♜xf2+** **30 ♗d2** I wonder what Slavin had missed. **30 ♖b3** is impossible on account of **30...♜b2+** **31 ♖c4 ♜c3+** **32 ♖b5 ♜b4** mate, and it's also mate after **30 ♖d3 ♜e3+**. **30...♜xg1** **31 ♖g2 ♜e3** Prudently covering the h6 square and so limiting White's attack to just the one check. **32 ♜xg6+** **♖h8** **33 ♖g2 ♖e8** **0-1**

Guildford endured a pretty miserable 2010/11 campaign, but started the new season looking like title challengers, with stalwart GMs Stuart Conquest, Tony Kosten and Jim Plaskett all turning out, not to mention Dagne Ciuksyte, fresh from her fine performance for the England women's team, and the 2600+ French grandmaster Romain Edouard. The ADs were butchered 6½-1½ and then the solid if mysteriously-named Blackthorne Russia (formerly Betsson) were clinically disposed of 5½-2½. The previous day Blackthorne had overcome Bristol 4½-3½, while e2e4.org.uk managed half a point more

Rk	Division 1, Pool A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1	Guildford I	x				5½-2½		6½-1½		12	4
2	Wood Green I		x		5½-2½				5-3	10½	4
3	Barbican II			x	3-5				5½-2½	8½	2
4	e2e4.org.uk		2½-5½	5-3	x					7½	2
5	Blackthorne Russia	2½-5½				x	4½-3½			7	2
6	Bristol					3½-4½	x	4-4		7½	1
7	The ADs	1½-6½					4-4	x		5½	1
8	Anglian Avengers		3-5	2½-5½					x	5½	0

Rk	Division 1, Pool B	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1	Cheddleton			4½-3½					6-2	10½	4
2	White Rose				4½-3½			5-3		9½	4
3	Barbican I	3½-4½				5½-2½				9	2
4	Jutes of Kent		3½-4½				5-3			8½	2
5	Cambridge Univ			2½-5½					4½-3½	7	2
6	Oxford				3-5			4-3½		7	2
7	Wood Green II		3-5				3½-4			6½	0
8	Guildford II	2-6				3½-4½				5½	0

in their win over Barbican II. The young Barbican II side bounced back to register 5½-2½ against Anglian Avengers and should have far more than enough to avoid being drawn into a relegation scrap as the season unfolds, but do expect to see the East Anglians stuck in the middle of that, along with Bristol and the ADs who drew their round two encounter.

Finally, I must thank Jack Rudd and his fellow inputters for having all the games on the 4NCL website by the day after the opening weekend – a fantastic effort – before concluding with crisp finishes from two of England's leading young stars.

Round 1, e2e4.org.uk - Barbican II
C.Kilpatrick - R.R.Griffiths



White's c-pawn is going nowhere, but never forget that opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker. Here Kilpatrick struck with: **50 ♗xg6!** **♗xg6** **51 ♖e6+** **♖g7** **52 ♜xf5 ♜xf2+** Desperation as there's no good defence to the threat of check on g6 and mate on h5. **53 ♜xf2 ♗xf2** **54 ♖xf2 ♖c8** **55 ♖e5** **1-0** Black might have continued hoping for the well-known stalemate tricks against the g- and h-pawns, but I'm sure that a man with a GM norm in his pocket would have known just how to convert.



Callum Kilpatrick: red-hot tactician

Round 2, Anglian Avengers - Barbican II
S.Munson - S.Franklin



49...♜xh2! Concluding in style. **50 ♖xh2** **g3** Queen and knight are notoriously strong when up against an exposed king and here Black even has a pawn or two to help. **51 ♖xf3** It's mate if he lets the queen in, but even this won't keep it out for long. **51...gxf2+** **52 ♖g2 ♜g3+** **53 ♖f1 ♜h3+** **0-1**