

Report on Divisions 3 and 4 Weekend 5, 2016-17 by Steve Burke

In the promotion group of Division 3 South, Wood Green completed their clean sweep with three more wins to storm to the title. With the strength of their squad, I'm sure they will be expecting to do well in the Second Division next season.

The race for the second promotion place was tight, as expected. The Fermented Sharks hopes were hit by a loss on Saturday to Poisoned Pawns, while Anglian Avengers and Wessex also got off to winning starts. The Avengers then lost narrowly to Wood Green, while the Sharks defeated Wessex and The Pawns won again.



So the Sharks were in second place going into the last round, a point ahead of The Pawns and two ahead of The Avengers and Wessex. Unfortunately for the Sharks they were up against Wood Green, who were in no mood to be generous. The Avengers beat Wessex to leapfrog them, but The Poisoned Pawns also won their last round to clinch that second spot in Division 2 next season.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Wood Green MM 1		3½-2½	3½-2½	5-1	4½-1½	6-0	3½-2½	5-1	31	14
2 Poisoned Pawns 1	2½-3½		3½-2½	4-2	2-4	4-2	3½-2½	5-1	24½	10
3 Anglian Avengers 2	2½-3½	2½-3½		3-3	4½-1½	3½-2½	4½-1½	3½-2½	24	9
4 Fermented Sharks	1-5	2-4	3-3		4-2	4½-1½	4½-1½	4-2	23	9
5 Wessex	1½-4½	4-2	1½-4½	2-4		4-2	3-3	3½-2½	19½	7
6 Leeds University Old Boys	0-6	2-4	2½-3½	1½-4½	2-4		4-2	5-1	17	4
7 MK Phoenix 1	2½-3½	2½-3½	1½-4½	1½-4½	3-3	2-4		3-3	16	2
8 Shropshire 1	1-5	1-5	2½-3½	2-4	2½-3½	1-5	3-3		13	1

As expected, the relegation group was very tight, and going into the last round there was still everything to play for with the six bottom-placed teams facing each other. The Sussex Martlets were a point ahead of the pack on 6 points, while Icenis and Surbiton were a little adrift. They both lost narrowly, which moved the Rookies and Hackney up to 7 points. In the other critical match the Martlets lost to Rhyfelwyr Essyllwg, and suddenly they were relegated. When all the bean counting was complete, Hackney were the unfortunate one of the three teams that finished on 7 points.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	GP	Pts
1 Brown Jack 1		3-3	4-2	3-3	3½-2½	4-2	5-1	4-2	26½	12
2 Cambridge University 2	3-3		2½-3½	4-2	3½-2½	3-3	4-2	3½-2½	23½	10
3 The Rookies	2-4	3½-2½		3-3	2½-3½	5-1	3½-2½	2½-3½	22	7
4 Rhyfelwyr Essyllwg	3-3	2-4	3-3		3-3	3½-2½	3-3	3-3	20½	7
5 Hackney	2½-3½	2½-3½	3½-2½	3-3		1-5	3½-2½	3½-2½	19½	7
6 Sussex Martlets 2	2-4	3-3	1-5	2½-3½	5-1		3-3	3½-2½	20	6
7 Icenis 1	1-5	2-4	2½-3½	3-3	2½-3½	3-3		4½-1½	18½	4
8 Surbiton	2-4	2½-3½	3½-2½	3-3	2½-3½	2½-3½	1½-4½		17½	3

In the North, everything was settled over the Saturday and Sunday. Manchester Manticores 1 continued winning their matches by big margins to clinch top spot, finishing with a perfect 11 wins.

Manchester Manticores 2, who were in contention going into the weekend, played all the top three teams, losing heavily to each.

Gonzaga lost to 3Cs 2 as part of a triangular match, the rules for which I won't even begin to explain here. That left the door open for Manx Liberty to take the second promotion place as, after a close win over Ashfield Breadsall 1 on the Saturday, they clinched promotion on Sunday with a win against Manticores 2.

	P	W	D	L	GP	Pts
Manchester Manticores 1	11	11	0	0	48½	22
Manx Liberty	11	9	1	1	45	19
Gonzaga	11	8	0	3	47½	16
3Cs 2	11	5	3	3	36½	13
Cheddleton 2	11	6	1	4	35½	13
Jorvik	11	5	3	3	32½	13
Ashfield Breadsall 1	11	5	2	4	34½	12
Bradford DCA Knights B	11	5	1	5	34½	11
Manchester Manticores 2	11	5	0	6	30	10
Ashfield Breadsall 2	11	4	2	5	29	10

In Division 4 South, the leaders Oxford 2 were weaker than previously and were held to draws on Saturday and Sunday, while second placed Barnet Knights 1 were winning handsomely to come level on 17 points and just ½ a game point behind them. In the final round Barnet had the lower rated opponents and managed to score 1½ points more than Oxford to nick the title on the line!

It looks to me as if one more team will probably be promoted and, of the chasing pack, West is Best 2 had the best of the first two days winning both games. So going into the last round West is Best 2, The Full Ponty and Brown Jack 2 were all on 14 points. The latter two were both held to draws, while West is Best 2 managed to win 3½ - 2½ to take third spot.

	P	W	D	L	GP	Pts
Barnet Knights 1	11	9	1	1	46½	19
Oxford 2	11	8	3	0	45½	19
West is Best 2	11	8	0	3	38½	16
The Full Ponty	11	6	3	2	40	15
Brown Jack 2	11	6	3	2	39½	15

So another season has flown by.

I hope you have a good summer and come back ready for the fight again in November.

Star (?) Game

[Download the below game in PGN](#)

With this being the last weekend, in the interests of journalistic alacrity, I wanted this report to be published as soon as possible. So I won't wait for all the games to be published to find a star game.

Under this flimsy pretext, I offer up my own game from the final round in the North below. I do think it has a nice finish and I can at least offer a personal perspective on the game rather than guessing what the players might have been thinking as I usually do!

When the rest of the games are published, I will have a look and perhaps serve up an actual Star Game if anything catches my eye.

**Burke, Steven J (1900) - Cowan, Richard M (1892) [E65]
4NCL, Ashfield-Breadsall v Jorvik (11), 01.05.2017
[Burke, Steven J & Komodo 10]**

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.g3 Bg7 4.Bg2 d6 5.O-O O-O 6.c4 Nbd7



Black has a lot of options, but this is the most popular here.

7.Nc3 c5!? By far the main line is 7...e5 with 7...c6 the clear second choice, but this seems like a decent "sideline".

8.b3 Perhaps the issue with 7...c5 is that it leaves white several good ways to play. I chose an English set up. I could play a Benoni, 8.d5 a6 9.a4 Rb8 10.Qc2; A Sicilian Maroczy position, 8.e4 cxd4 9.Nxd4; There's even the solid option, 8.e3

8...a6 9.Bb2 Rb8



I still have all the above options, but it's time to choose.

10.dxc5 Nxc5 I decided this was better than 10...dxc5?! 11.Qc2 b5 12.cxb5 axb5 13.Rfd1+/= so, in choosing this line, I was pretty sure that I would get the game continuation.

11.b4 Ne6= The other option was 11...Ncd7 12.Qb3 Nb6 13.Nd5 (The threat was 13.-- Be6) 13...Be6 14.Nd4 (Komodo offers the complicated option, 14.e4!? Nxe4 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.Nxb6 Qxb6 17.Rae1! f5 (17...Nf6? 18.Ng5+/-) 18.Qb2+ Kg8 19.Nd2! d5 (19...Nxd2?? 20.Rxe6 Nxc4 21.Qb3+-) 20.cxd5 Bxd5 21.Nxe4 fxe4 22.Re3+/-) 14...Bd7 15.Nxb6 Qxb6 16.Rfd1=

12.Qb3 b5 13.cxb5 axb5



14.Nd5= This virtually forces the exchange of black's king bishop, which is usually a good idea. A very different plan that I considered was to play this as a Sicilian Dragon with 14.e4!? This was Komodo's choice for a while, but then it evened out somewhat. It gives 14...Bb7 15.Rfe1 and white seems to have a nice little edge, e.g. 15...Qb6 (Originally it was suggesting 15...Ng4 16.h3 Ne5 17.Nxb5 Bc6 18.Nxe5 dxe5 19.a4+/-) 16.Re2 Rbc8 17.Rd1 Nc7 18.Nd5 Ncx5 19.exd5 though obviously there is plenty of play for both sides.

14...Nxd5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.Qxd5 Bb7 17.Qd3 Qb6=



This was the position that I was most expecting when playing my 10th move. I have a potential passed pawn on the queenside and good pieces, but black has more central pawns. So I need to come up with a plan.

18.Rfc1 Rfc8 19.Bh3= Tempting black to respond as he did, but also allowing my knight to move without the bishop being exchanged. I was toying with the idea of throwing in 19.h4 first, but black can then deal with the pin, e.g. 19...Ra8 20.a3 Bc6 21.Bh3 Bd7=

19...f5!? Probably the most ambitious of black's many options here, aiming to use the central superiority at the expense of a weakened king position.

19...Bxf3 20.exf3 (20.Bxe6 fxe6 21.exf3 e5=) 20...Rxc1+ 21.Rxc1 Nd4 22.f4 Ra8=

19...Kg8 20.a3 (20.Bxe6 fxe6 21.e4 Rxc1+ 22.Rxc1 Rf8=) 20...Rxc1+ 21.Rxc1 Rc8 22.Rxc8+ Bxc8=

20.Qb3?! Trying for more than equality with 20.Bg2= but it seems this is slightly inaccurate.

20...Kf6?!= I was a little surprised that Komodo gave black a 0.3 advantage after 20...Nd4! 21.Nxd4 Qxd4 22.Qe6 Qf6 23.Qe3 but I suppose he does get some space advantage after 23...Be4 24.a3 d5=/+ After the game move, I decided to repeat once or twice to get closer to the 40 moves, as I'd used quite a lot of time looking at options. However this may well be a slight inaccuracy.

21.Qb2+ Having tempted black forward, the bishop should come back to the long diagonal, 21.Bg2=

21...Kf7 22.Qb3 Bxf3!?=



Black played this almost instantly, so it was fairly obvious he was playing for a win. I hadn't yet decided if I would have repeated myself.

23.Qxf3 Komodo has a slight preference for 23.exf3 and for example 23...Kf6 24.f4 Nd4 25.Qd3= but there's not much in it, and it seems odd to give him a passed pawn.

23...Nd4 24.Qd3 e5?+/- Black needed to play for a win for the team, and this looked like the right move, but the soundest way is to play against my bishop with 24...d5 25.Bg2 e6 26.e3 Nc6 27.Qb1 Ne5 28.a4 bxa4 29.Rxa4 Kf6=

25.e3!?



I have other options, but this is the most forcing and I was happy when I realised that I could play this way.

25...Nf3+ 26.Kh1 e4?! The obvious 26...Qb7?! is well met by 27.Bg2 e4 (27...Ke7 28.Rd1 Qc6 29.Qf1 Qb7 30.a4 bxa4 31.Rxa4 e4 32.Bxf3 exf3 33.Qd3+/-) 28.Qxd6 Qe7 29.Qf4 (29.Qd5+!? Qe6 30.Rxc8 Qxd5 31.Rxb8 Ne5 32.Kg1+/-) 29...Qe5 30.Bxf3 Qxf4 31.gxf4 exf3 32.h4+/- Komodo's best is 26...Ng5 27.Qd5+ Kf6 28.Bg2 Rc7 29.h4 Ne6 30.Kg1+/-

27.Qd5+ Ke7? The fatal mistake! When playing this, black had missed my 30th move. After 27...Kg7 I would probably have played 28.g4 (I was also considering Komodo's preference 28.Bf1 Rd8 29.Be2 Ne5 30.Kg2 Qb7 31.Rd1+/-) 28...Rf8 29.gxf5 Rbe8 30.Rc6 Qd8 31.Qxd6 Qxd6 32.Rxd6 gxf5 33.Rd5 Re5 34.Rd7+ Kf6 35.Rc1+/- 27...Kf6 28.Bf1 Rxc1 29.Rxc1 Ne5 30.Rc3+/-

28.g4!





31...gxf5? After this the black king is caught in a maelstrom of white pieces. Relatively best was 31...Kf8 but it shouldn't save him, 32.fxg6 hxg6 33.Qxe4 Ne5 34.Rc4!+-

32.Bxf5 Ne5 33.Qe6+ Kf8 34.Rxd6 Re8 35.Qf6+ Nf7 There are some neat lines after 35...Qf7 36.Qh8+



36...Qg8 (36...Ke7 37.Qxe5+ Kf8 38.Qh8+ Ke7 39.Rd7#) 37.Rf6+ Ke7 (37...Nf7 38.Qxg8+ Kxg8 39.Be6+-) 38.Qxg8 Rxg8 39.Re6+ Kf7 40.Rxe5+-

36.Rd7+-



Having broken a streak of fifteen 4NCL games without a win (stretching back to the last round two years ago!) in Sunday's match, this was a nice way to finish the season. **1-0**