

The 2007/08 season of the 4NCL kicked off in mid-September, with Guildford-ADC the clear favourites to retain their title. Three newly promoted teams, Barbican 2, Richmond and Cambridge University 1, will be hoping to maintain their place in the top flight of British chess.

Round two saw a meeting between Guildford's first and second teams. Unsurprisingly the first team achieved victory in the match, although they did not have everything their own way as you can see from the following encounter.

Daniel King (2528) White
Graeme Buckley (2390) Black
 Round Two
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 d4 f3 e6 3 c3 d5 4 e5 c6
 4 ... d4!? is an interesting alternative, but Buckley doesn't mind a French.

5 d4

King is something of an expert in the White side of the Advance French, so he would also have been happy with this transposition.

5 ... d7 6 e2 g7 7 0-0 c8!?

An interesting waiting move. 7 ... g6, 7 ... f5 and 7 ... cxd4 have been the most popular choices. The idea of the text is to be more flexible. Black plays a generally useful move and avoids revealing his intentions with regard to the other pieces.

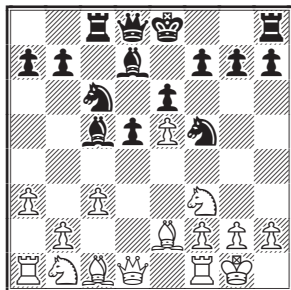
8 a3 f5!?

Usually Black exchanges on d4 before making this knight move, for reasons that will be explained shortly. Still, the course of the game shows that Buckley's approach also has its merits.

9 dxc5!?

9 b4 has been more common, but in a way the text is quite a principled reaction to Black's last. The main point of ... f5 is obviously to pressurise d4, so White simply removes this target in an effort to render the knight ineffective. This should be compared with the capture on the previous move: 8 dxc5 g6 9 e3 cxe5 10 dxe5 dxe5 11 b4 e7 as seen in many games including Gwaze-Greet, Scarborough 2004.

9 ... xc5



10 d3 h4!

4NCL season kicks off

by Andrew Greet

Now that the d4-pawn has disappeared the knight had little purpose on f5, so Buckley logically prepares to exchange it for White's useful king's knight.

11 bd2 b6

Prophylaxis against a possible b3.

12 e2

12 dxc4 xh4 13 f3 was an alternative.

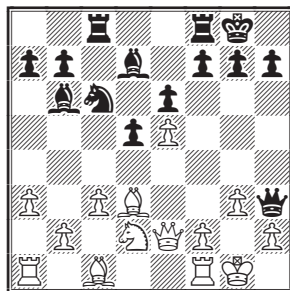
12 ... 0-0 13 dxc4

White would ideally prefer to make an additional developing move such as 13 e1 to avoid helping the Black queen to take up an active position. On the other hand, with ... f6 on the horizon there is an obvious risk associated with removing a defender of f2.

13 ... xh4 14 g3!?

This needlessly weakens the kingside. 14 f3 looks preferable, although even here 14 ... h5 followed by ... f6 looks quite reasonable for Black.

14 ... h3



15 b3?

It seems incredible, but after this quite natural move White's position is already beyond salvation. 15 f3 was necessary, when there could follow 15 ... f6 16 exf6 gxf6 17 e3 e5 18 xb6 axb6, while 16 ... h5!? may be even better. The Black position certainly looks healthy in both cases, but everything is still to play for.

15 ... f6! 16 exf6 e5!

This energetic mobilisation of the central pawns is far stronger than the routine 16 ... xf6.

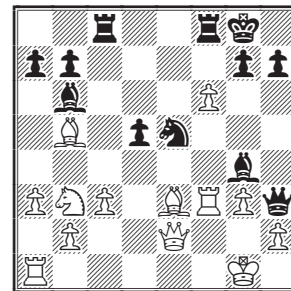
17 e3

17 fxg7 is beautifully refuted by 17 ... g4!! 18 gxf8=+ xf8 when queen moves are met by 19 ... f3 mating.

17 ... e4 18 b5?

Relatively best would have been 18 xb6, although 18 ... exd3 19 xd3 axb6 20 fxg7 f5 should still be a fairly comfortable win for Black.

18 ... g4 19 f3 exf3 20 xf3 e5



The pin on the rook is terminal..

21 d2 xf3+ 22 xf3 xf6 0-1

White resigned, as further material losses are inevitable.

The good thing about having a team stacked full of GMs is that even when one of them has an off day, the chances are that the others will still bring in enough points to win the match. The following game, a skilful positional crush by Mark Hebden, is a case in point.

Mark Hebden (2519) White
Mohammed Tissir (2465) Black
 Round Two
Torre Attack

This season the Division 1 champions have been strengthened by the arrival of Mohammed Tissir, an amiable Moroccan IM who was one of my room-mates at this year's Gibraltar Masters. In this match he was placed on top board for the second team, against one of Guildford's most consistent performers.

1 d4 f6 2 f3 e6 3 c3

At first glance this looks like a very timid move, but Hebden has moulded it into quite a potent weapon, as this writer has found to his cost on more than one occasion! The idea is to play a Torre system with g5, while avoiding the defensive system occurring after 3 g5 h6 4 h4 d6 5 bd2 g5!? 6 g3 h5, forcing the exchange of the 'Torre bishop'.

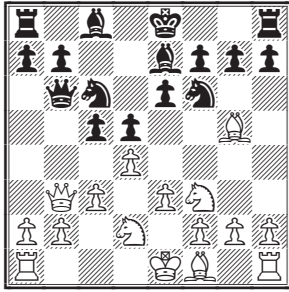
3 ... c5 4 g5 c6

4 ... b6 5 b3 should be compared with the game.

5 e3 b6

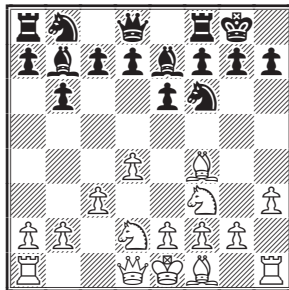
Slightly unusual. If Black is going to play this move early on, then he will usually do it on move 4, not that it matters a great deal.

6 b3 d5 7 bd2 e7



8 ♖f4!?

A novelty! Mark has previously been successful with 8 ♖e2 in Hebden-Bruned, La Pobra de Lillet 2005. However in recent times he seems to have become rather fond of this tempo-losing move, having used it to defeat your correspondent earlier this year at Southend, albeit in a slightly different variation of the Torre. For comparison, here are the opening moves of that game: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c3 b6 4 ♖g5 ♖b7 5 ♘bd2 ♖e7 6 h3 0-0 7 ♖f4!?



(analysis diagram)

7 ... d5 8 e3 ♘bd7 9 ♘e5 ♘xe5 10 ♖xe5 ♘d6 11 ♖b5 ♖xe5 12 dxe5 ♘e4 (Hebden-Greet, Southend 2007). The position at this point is completely equal, but Mark skilfully outplayed me in the middlegame.

I find it very interesting to consider the reasons why a top expert in this opening system has seen fit to break one of the most fundamental principles of opening play, namely to avoid moving the same piece twice in the early stages. Clearly he feels that there are certain variations in which this bishop works better on f4 than g5. "Why not just play the London system and save a tempo", I asked him after our game in Southend. His explanation was that – without going into too many technical details at this time – both the Torre and London systems may be met by a number of different defensive systems. Some of these systems are slightly more effective against a bishop on f4, while others work better against a bishop on g5. In the end he feels that it is preferable to begin with an early ♖g5 to avoid certain anti-London set-ups, and following up with ♖g5-f4 only after Black has committed himself to a less favourable formation.

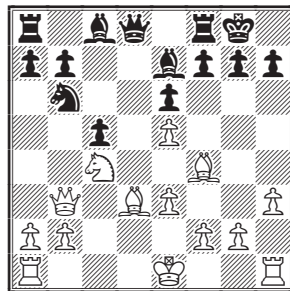
8 ... ♖d8

8 ... 0-0 looks sensible. Perhaps Mohammed was concerned about 9 ♖xb6 axb6 10 ♖c7, although this shouldn't be too serious after 10 ... ♘d7 11 ♖b5 ♖d8, or even 10 ... c4!? 11 ♖xb6 ♖d6 12 ♖c5 ♖xc5 13 dxc5 with unclear play.

9 h3 0-0 10 ♘e5 ♘xe5 11 dxe5 ♘d7 12 c4!

It looks right to challenge the Black centre, especially with the queen already on b3.

12 ... ♘b6 13 ♖d3 dxc4 14 ♘xc4



14 ... ♘d5?!

With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that Black should have attended to the development of his queenside with 14 ... ♖d7 15 ♘xb6 ♖xb6 16 ♖xb6 axb6.

15 ♖d1 ♖c7 16 ♖e4 ♘xf4 17 exf4

White is clearly better thanks to his lead in development, superior pieces and outpost on d6. The doubled f-pawns are of no consequence whatsoever.

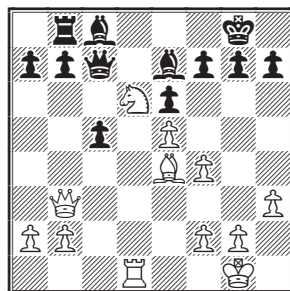
17 ... ♖d8 18 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 19 0-0 ♖b8

It is quite difficult for Black to develop his queenside pieces.

20 ♖d1 ♖c7

20 ... ♖d7 allows White to win a pawn with 21 ♖xh7+!.

21 ♘d6



21 ... ♖f8

This is an important moment, at which it deserves attention for Black to continue his queenside development with 21 ... ♖d7!? Despite the risky appearance, White can in fact grab the b-pawn with 22 ♘xb7, e.g. 22 ... ♖c6? 23 ♖xc6 ♖xc6 24 ♘a5! or 22 ... ♖c8 23 ♖a4! ♖xb7 24 ♖d7 ♖c8 25 ♖xe7 ♖xe4 26 ♖xe4, both of which win for White. At the same time, we must remember that Black does not necessarily have to attempt to win the

knight immediately. Instead he can try to improve his position with something like 22 ... f5!? 23 exf6 (23 ♖f3 c4!) 23 ... ♖xf6 when, at the cost of a pawn, he has at least managed to free his position and open a few lines for his bishops.

22 ♖a4! a5?

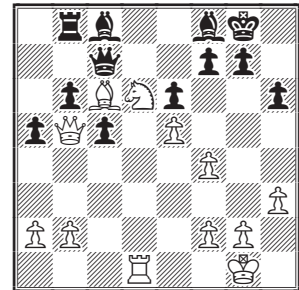
This looks like an unnecessary weakening. 22 ... a6 would have prevented White's subsequent use of the b5-square.

23 ♖e8 ♖e7 24 ♖b5 ♖c7 25 ♘c4 b6 26 ♘d6 h6?!

This looks like a good time for 26 ... ♖d7.

27 ♖c6

Now Black will have to watch out for bishop excursions to the 8th rank, targeting f7.



27 ... ♖a6?

Tissir's wish to free his position is understandable, but the text loses by force. Necessary was 27 ... ♖d8 when White has no immediate win, despite his unquestionable advantage.

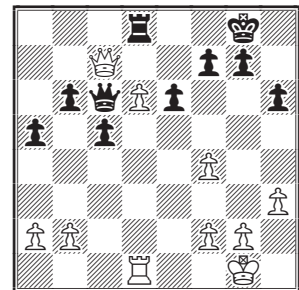
28 ♖xa6 ♖xc6 29 ♖a7! ♖xd6

This soon loses, but there was no other way to defend f7.

30 exd6 ♖d8

Equally hopeless is 30 ... ♖c8 31 ♖e7.

31 ♖c7!



Black resigned in view of 31 ... ♖xc7 32 dxc7 ♖xd1+ 33 ♖h2 when the c-pawn is unstoppable, while after 31 ... ♖d7 there follows 32 ♖xb6 with an easily winning ending. **1-0**

A glance at the Division 1 score table (shown at the end of this article) reveals Barbican 1 as the early leaders after winning their early matches by convincing margins. Here is a swift victory from their top player, Grandmaster Jonathan Parker.

Jan Smolen (2327) White
Jonathan Parker (2521) Black
 Round Two

Two Knights Defence (transposition)

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♙c4 ♗f6 5 e5 ♗e4!?

This underrated move is a worthwhile alternative to the more common 5 ... d5.

6 0-0

6 ♙d5 ♗c5 is an alternative.

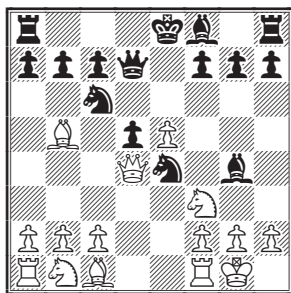
6 ... d5 7 ♙b5

This is fairly timid. The critical continuation is 7 exd6 ♗xd6 8 ♙d5 ♗f5 9 ♖e1+ ♙e7 10 ♙xc6+ bxc6 11 g4, although the general consensus seems to be that Black is okay here as well.

7 ... ♙g4

Black can transpose to a standard position with 7 ... ♙c5 8 ♗xd4, but prefers to remain on independent territory.

8 ♗xd4 ♗d7!?



8 ... ♙c5 has been more common, but the text also has its merits. Black retains the possibility of the thematic regrouping ... ♗c5-e6, and – unusually for the open games – may also be able to contemplate long castling in certain variations.

9 ♙xc6?!

It seems like a concession to give up this bishop immediately. 9 ♗d3 looks more consistent, after which 9 ... ♙xf3 10 ♗xf3 a6 11 ♙a4 b5 12 ♙b3 0-0-0!?

led to highly irregular play in Ottenweller-Bartsch, email 1999.

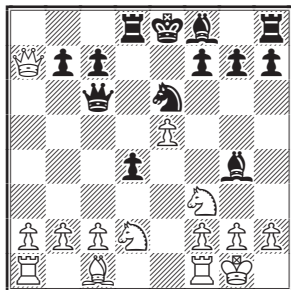
9 ... ♗xc6 10 ♗bd2 ♖d8

10 ... ♙c5 11 ♗d3 0-0-0!?

also looks tempting. 11 ♗d3 ♗c5 12 ♗e3 ♗e6 13 ♗xa7?!

This pawn grabbing expedition looks way too optimistic.

13 ... d4!



Black can, of course, obtain excellent compensation with the routine

13 ... ♙c5 14 ♗a5 0-0 but the text poses White more concrete problems.

14 b4?

This does not help, although it is a measure of White's discomfort that the computer proposes the ugly 14 ♗b3 ♙xf3 15 gxf3 as his relatively best continuation. 14 c3 is another candidate move, but this can be refuted by 14 ... dxc3 15 bxc3 ♙c5 16 ♗a5 ♗f4! with the powerful threat of ... ♗xd2.

14 ... ♙xb4 15 ♖b1 ♙xd2 16 ♗xd2 b6!

Threatening to trap the queen with ... ♗a8.

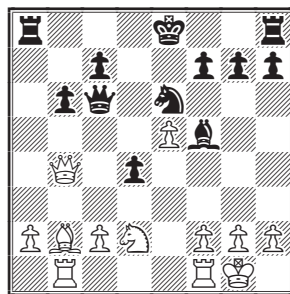
17 ♗a3 ♙f5 18 ♙b2?!

The bishop has no future here, though admittedly it is hard to suggest a worthwhile alternative.

18 ... ♗a8

18 ... ♗f4 19 ♗f3 ♗g6 20 g3 ♙xc2 also looks crushing.

19 ♗b4?!



A final blunder in an already lost position. Presumably Smolen wished to prevent Black from castling, but forgot about the safety of his queen.

19 ... ♗a4 0-1

My own team Hilsmark Kingfisher have lost a few titled players this season, but on the positive side we have been helped by the arrival of the inform Stephen Gordon who is on the verge of completing his Grandmaster title. After winning his game on the Saturday, his next opponent was Karl Mah of the newly promoted Cambridge University. Karl is a highly talented player – he was extremely strong in his early teenage years and I can vividly recall several tough encounters against him in junior events. He has been an IM for many years and still manages to maintain a 2400+ rating, despite not playing in many events nowadays.

Stephen Gordon (2490) White
Karl Mah (2418) Black
 Round Two
Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 ♗f3 ♗f6 3 c4 c6 4 ♗c3 a6 5 a4

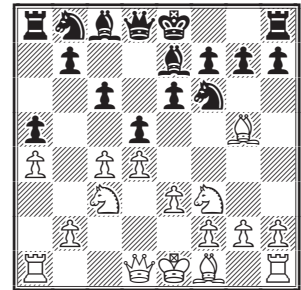
Quite an attractive answer to the ... a6 Slav. Black's intended ... b5 is prevented and he must select another plan.

5 ... e6 6 ♙g5 ♙e7

6 ... ♗bd7 7 a5 was Gagunashvili-

Haslinger, Hastings 2006/07, annotated in the March 2007 CHESS.

7 e3 a5!?



This seems logical enough, securing an outpost on b4 in an effort to highlight the drawback of White's fifth, although the course of the game shows that Black may still have difficulties equalising.

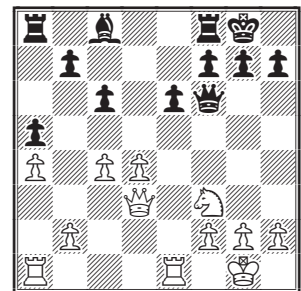
8 ♙d3 ♗a6 9 e4!

Playing in the centre is clearly White's strongest plan.

9 ... dxe4 10 ♗xe4 ♗b4

In a recent top class encounter Black also failed to solve his problems after 10 ... ♗xe4 11 ♙xe7 ♗xe7 12 ♙xe4 ♗b4+ 13 ♗d2 ♗xc4 (13 ... c5!?) 14 ♗e5 ♗b4 15 ♗xc6 ♗xd2+ 16 ♗xd2 ♗b8 17 ♗e5 f6 18 ♖hc1 ♗d7 19 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 20 ♖a3 gave White a clear endgame advantage which he successfully converted in Grischuk-Bacrot, Odessa 2007.

11 ♗xf6+ ♙xf6 12 ♙xf6 ♗xd3+ 13 ♗xd3 ♗xf6 14 0-0 0-0 15 ♖fe1

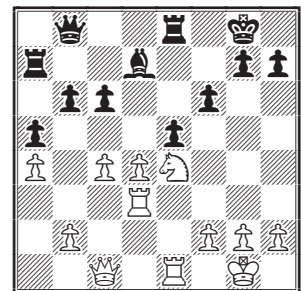


White enjoys a stable advantage due to his space advantage and especially the superior minor piece. Black must try to find a way to activate his bishop, but this is easier said than done.

15 ... ♗d8 16 ♖a3 f6 17 ♗e4 ♙d7 18 ♖d3 ♖e8 19 ♗f4 ♗b8 20 ♗c1

20 ♗h4 looks more natural, but the text does not spoil anything.

20 ... b6 21 ♗d2 ♖a7 22 ♗e4 e5?!



Fed up with defending his passive position, Black embarks on a risky attempt to free himself.

23 ♖g3

This maintains a strong initiative, but White could have won in spectacular fashion with 23 ♖xf6+! gxf6 24 ♖g3+ ♖f7 (24 ... ♖h8? 25 ♖h6 wins immediately) 25 ♖h6 ♖e7 26 ♖g7+ ♖d8 27 ♖xf6+ ♖c8 (or 27 ... ♖c7 28 dxe5 ♖c8 29 e6+-) 28 ♖xe5 ♖d8 (28 ... ♖xe5 29 dxe5 is hopeless) 29 ♖xh7 and with four pawns plus a raging initiative for the piece, White should win comfortably.

23 ... ♖f7?

23 ... ♖f8 was mandatory, when there is no immediate win as 24 ♖h6 ♖f5! defends, as 25 ♖xf6+? ♖h8 actually loses material for White.

24 c5!

24 ♖xf6! gxf6 25 ♖h6 would reach the note to White's 23rd, but the text should also prove decisive.

24 ... ♖e7?

24 ... bxc5 was mandatory. Then 25 ♖xc5 ♖e6 26 ♖d1 leaves Black under heavy pressure, but the win is not yet a formality.

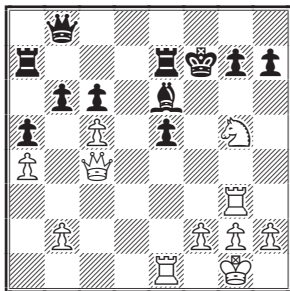
25 dxe5 fxe5 26 ♖c4+

Now the Black monarch has no route back to safety, and the rest of his army are in no position to help.

26 ... ♖e6

26 ... ♖f8 27 ♖f3+ is terminal.

27 ♖g5+



27 ... ♖f6

The only way to defend the bishop, but moving the king here on a board full of pieces is tantamount to resignation. The last few moves can pass without comment.

28 ♖xh7+ ♖f7 29 ♖g5+ ♖f6 30 ♖h4 ♖d5 31 ♖h7+ ♖e6 32 ♖g4+

And Black resigned in view of 32 ... ♖f7 33 ♖xg7+ ♖e8 34 ♖f8+ winning the queen.

1-0

Finally, a miniature from the same match:

Craig Hanley (2447) White
David Garner (2188) Black
 Round Two
 French Defence

Sitting opposite the Cambridge University team was an unusual experience for this writer – almost like

being at a school reunion, seeing familiar faces from the past. But of course, instead of knowing these faces from school, I knew them from countless junior chess events. Many of us were friends off the board, as well as rivals across it. David Garner is a case in point – I would struggle to count the number of times we must have played over the years. Like many of the Cambridge graduates his chess time is limited, doubtlessly due to a busy career. Still, this is one of the nice things about the 4NCL; it allows such people to maintain an occasional yet regular contact with the game of chess, which played such a prominent role in their early years.

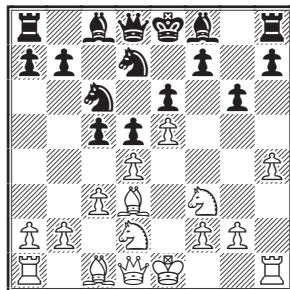
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖d2 ♖f6 4 e5 ♖fd7 5 ♖d3 c5 6 c3 ♖c6 7 ♖gf3!?

7 ♖e2 is the main line, but the text is an interesting and popular alternative.

7 ... g6!?

Not a typical move for the French, but in this position it has been seen in numerous games. Compared with the more common 7 ♖e2, the drawback of 7 ♖gf3 is that White's central pawns could be slightly less stable (indeed, it is quite common for him to sacrifice the d4-pawn in some variations). The idea of the fianchetto is that after the imminent ... f7-f6, the bishop will be perfectly placed to increase the central pressure. The drawback is that White is immediately presented with a target on the kingside, something which Hanley wastes no time in highlighting.

8 h4!?



Now the game becomes very sharp.

8 ... cxd4

8 ... h6!? is an alternative, preparing to meet h5 with ... g5, keeping the kingside closed, although the drawback is that ... f6 will now be harder to achieve due to the vulnerability of g6.

9 cxd4 f6!?

A very uncompromising approach. Objectively this should be playable for Black, although the opening of the kingside brings obvious risks and the margin for error becomes much tighter, as evidenced by the course of the game. 9 ... ♖b6 is the main alternative, when White can choose between:

a) 10 h5 g5 11 ♖xg5 ♖xd4 12 ♖df3 ♖b4+ 13 ♖f1 was pretty murky in Plaskett-Adamson, Newcastle 1998.

b) 10 ♖b3 h6 11 ♖e3 a5 12 a4 ♖db8 13 h5 g5 14 0-0 ♖b4 15 ♖e2 ♖8c6 16 ♖h2 ♖d7 17 ♖g4 0-0-0 18 f4 gxf4 19 ♖xf4 ♖b8 20 ♖d2 ♖e7 was Benjamin-Akobian, Seattle 2003.

10 exf6

Apparently the first new move. 10 h5 fxe5 11 dxe5 ♖dxe5 12 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 13 ♖f3 ♖a5+ 14 ♖f1 ♖xd3 15 ♖xd3 was pretty unclear in Laneza Vega-Morales Mendoza, Turin 2006. Perhaps White could have considered 11 hxg6!? e4 12 ♖xe4 dxe4 13 ♖xe4.

10 ... ♖xf6 11 h5!

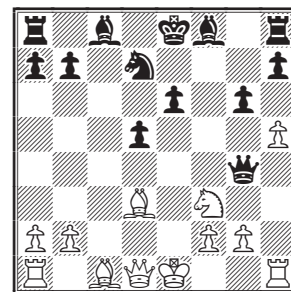
Hanley correctly ignores the centre, and instead ploughs forward on the kingside.

11 ... ♖xd4?!

This looks rather risky. 11 ... g5 12 ♖b3 looks quite pleasant for White; but 11 ... gxh5!? ; or even 11 ... e5!? were worth considering.

12 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 13 ♖f3 ♖g4??

13 ... ♖f6 was necessary, although Black's position still looks a little shaky after 14 hxg6 hxg6 15 ♖xg6+ ♖d8 16 ♖xh8 ♖xh8, or 14 ♖g5!? ♖xb2 15 0-0.



14 ♖h4! and Black resigned, as the queen will be lost after 14 ... ♖xg2 15 ♖f1. 1-0

4NCL Division 1 Game Points after two rounds

(Match points are given in brackets)

Barbican 1	13	(4)
The ADs	12	(4)
Betsson.com	11½	(4)
Guildford-ADC 1	10½	(4)
Hilsmark Kingfisher 1	9½	(3)
Guildford-ADC 2	6½	(2)
Richmond	7½	(1)
Wood Green	7½	(1)
North West Eagles 1	5½	(0)
Cambridge University 1	5	(0)
Barbican 2	4	(0)
Slough Sharks 1	3½	(0)