

Chess



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At the 4NCL

Britain's Lost GM
Gordon Crown

3rd London Chess Classic
Details inside

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4NCL

Rounds 3-6 of the British Team League season

Report by IM Andrew Greet

THE SECOND and third weekends of the 4NCL season took place on 15–16 January and 19-20 February respectively. With the two front-runners, Wood Green Hillsmark Kingfisher (WGHK) 1 and Pride and Prejudice (P&P), scheduled to face off at the end of the season, both teams were looking to rack up as many game points as possible, while the rest of the field battled to finish in the top half of their respective pools in order to avoid the dreaded relegation zone. Without further ado, let's see how the season has been shaping up. WGHK 1 achieved a comfortable win over Barbican 2 in round three, although the champions did not have everything their own way, as you can see from the following game.

Round 3 WGHK 1 - Barbican 2 J. Speelman - J. Rogers

English Opening

1 $\text{d}1\text{f3}$ $\text{d}1\text{f6}$ 2 c4 e6 3 $\text{d}1\text{c3}$ $\text{d}1\text{b4}$ 4 e3 0-0
5 $\text{d}1\text{e2}$ d5 6 a3 $\text{d}1\text{xc3}$ 7 bxc3 b6 8 cxd5
 exd5 9 c4 dxc4 10 $\text{d}1\text{xc4}$ $\text{d}1\text{c6}$ 11 $\text{d}1\text{b2}$
 $\text{d}1\text{a5}$ 12 $\text{d}1\text{e2}$ e8 13 0-0 $\text{d}1\text{d5}$ 14 $\text{c}1\text{c2}$
 $\text{c}1\text{d6}$ 15 $\text{d}1\text{d3}$ h6 16 e8ac1 c5 17 $\text{d}1\text{h4}$ $\text{c}1\text{c6}$
18 f4 c4 19 $\text{d}1\text{e2}$ $\text{d}1\text{b7}$ 20 $\text{d}1\text{f3}$ $\text{c}1\text{c5}$



21 $\text{d}1\text{d4!}$ Speelman offers a pawn in order to embark on a dangerous attack. 21... $\text{c}1\text{xa3}$ 22 $\text{d}1\text{f5}$ $\text{d}1\text{b3}$ Black can exchange the queens with 22... $\text{c}1\text{d3}$, but after 23 $\text{c}1\text{xd3}$ cxd3 24 $\text{d}1\text{gx7}$ he still faces difficult problems. 23 $\text{d}1\text{b2}$ $\text{c}1\text{a2?!$ This leaves the queen offside. 23... $\text{c}1\text{c5}$ was stronger and would have given White some chances to go wrong, for instance: 24 $\text{d}1\text{gx7}$ (24 $\text{e}1\text{cd1!?$ is slightly better for White) 24... $\text{d}1\text{xe3!}$ 25 dxe3 $\text{e}1\text{xe3}$ 26 $\text{c}1\text{f2}$ (26 $\text{c}1\text{h1!}$ is better and should keep some advantage for White) 26... $\text{d}1\text{xc1}$ 27 $\text{d}1\text{xb7}$ $\text{d}1\text{d3}$ 28 $\text{d}1\text{a3!}$ $\text{c}1\text{d4!}$ with approximately equal chances in this wildly complicated position. 24 $\text{d}1\text{xd5}$ White's attack is based entirely on the dark squares, so he eliminates an important defender. 24... $\text{d}1\text{xd5}$ 25 $\text{c}1\text{c3}$ f6 26 $\text{d}1\text{gx7!}$ $\text{d}1\text{xc1}$ 27



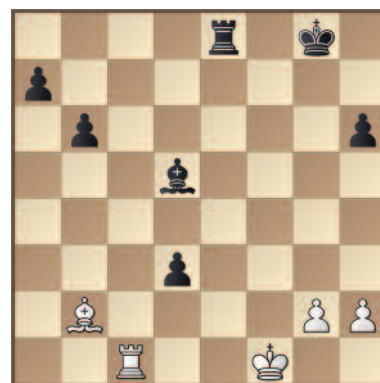
Man bites 'Speelwolf': Jonathan Rogers won his game against Jon Speelman.

$\text{e}1\text{xc1}$ For a small material investment White has obtained a powerful attack on the dark squares. 27... $\text{c}1\text{a5}$ Black has to get his queen back into play without delay.



28 $\text{c}1\text{xf6?!$ Sometimes one bad move is all it takes to throw the entire game away. White could have kept a serious advantage in one of two ways: 28 $\text{c}1\text{xa5}$ bxa5 29 $\text{d}1\text{xe8}$ $\text{e}1\text{xe8}$ 30 $\text{e}1\text{a1}$ is a miserable endgame for Black. With Speelman being a noted endgame specialist, one would have to fancy his chances of winning this against just about anyone. White can also maintain his attack with 28 $\text{c}1\text{d4!?$ with the possible continuation 28... $\text{c}1\text{c5}$ (otherwise $\text{d}1\text{h5}$ will be crushing) 29 $\text{c}1\text{xf6}$ (thanks to the intermediate queen moves, the d2 pawn is no longer *en prise*) 29... $\text{e}1\text{xe3!}$ (the best chance, but it is not quite good enough) 30 dxe3 $\text{c}1\text{xe3+}$ 31 $\text{c}1\text{h1}$ $\text{c}1\text{e2}$ 32 $\text{c}1\text{g6!}$ (32 $\text{e}1\text{g1}$ $\text{d}1\text{gx2+}$ leads to a perpetual) 32... $\text{d}1\text{f7}$ 33 $\text{c}1\text{b1!}$ when White defends against all

threats and will win with his extra piece. 28... $\text{c}1\text{xd2}$ Suddenly the tables are turned and it is the white king which is desperately exposed. 29 $\text{c}1\text{g6}$ $\text{c}1\text{xe3+}$ 30 $\text{c}1\text{f1}$ $\text{c}1\text{xf4+}$ 31 $\text{c}1\text{g1}$ $\text{c}1\text{e3+}$ 32 $\text{c}1\text{f1}$ $\text{c}1\text{f4+}$ Presumably Rogers repeated moves to get closer to the time control. 33 $\text{c}1\text{g1}$ $\text{c}1\text{e3+}$ 34 $\text{c}1\text{f1}$ $\text{d}1\text{d3+}$ The computer points out 34... $\text{d}1\text{f7}$ as a more convincing win, but Rogers' choice is perfectly sufficient. 35 $\text{c}1\text{xd3}$ cxd3 36 $\text{d}1\text{xe8}$ $\text{e}1\text{xe8}$



The opposite-coloured bishops offer White little hope of survival here. 37 $\text{d}1\text{d4}$ $\text{e}1\text{e2}$ 38 $\text{d}1\text{f2}$ b5 39 $\text{e}1\text{e1}$ $\text{d}1\text{c4}$ 40 $\text{e}1\text{xe2}$ d2! 0-1 A nice flourish to end the game.

The most eye-catching result of the third weekend, and possibly of the entire season so far, was Polish IM Jerzy Slaby's defeat of Mickey Adams - with the black pieces, no less! Here is the game.

Round 5 P&P - Pandora's Box M. Adams - J. Slaby

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 $\text{d}1\text{f3}$ $\text{d}1\text{c6}$ 3 $\text{d}1\text{b5}$ d6 4 0-0 $\text{d}1\text{d7}$
5 $\text{e}1\text{e1}$ $\text{d}1\text{f6}$ 6 c3 Adams chooses the main line. The principal alternative is 6 h3. 6... a6 7 $\text{d}1\text{f1}$ $\text{d}1\text{g4}$ Black is willing to forfeit the bishop pair in order to inhibit White's central advance. 8 h3 $\text{d}1\text{xf3}$ 9 $\text{c}1\text{xf3}$ g6 10 d3 $\text{d}1\text{g7}$ 11 $\text{d}1\text{e3}$ 0-0 12 $\text{d}1\text{d2}$ $\text{d}1\text{d7}$



13 ♖e2 Slightly unusual. 13 ♖d1 is more common, although the difference is not huge. **13...b5 14 a3 a5 15 ♗f3 b4** This was the first new move, although it is certainly consistent with Black's previous play. Previous games have continued **15...♗de5 16 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 17 ♖d2 ♗g7 18 d4**, with a small edge for White, Lutz – Suran, Germany 2005, and **15...♖b6 16 ♗ed1 e5!?**, which was unclear in Nolte – Markos, Beijing 2008. **16 d4** Adams correctly leaves the a-pawns on the board. In the event of **16 axb4 axb4 17 d4 bxc3 18 bxc3**, White's bishop pair does not mean much as the battleground is rapidly shrinking to an area that the knights can easily cover. **16...bxc3 17 bxc3 ♖b8 18 ♖c2 ♖c7 19 ♗ab1**



At this stage White enjoys a pleasant edge. The bishop pair is significant, especially as Black has a slight hole on b5. Another idea was **19 d5 ♗ce5 20 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 21 a4**, although Black may be able to get away with **21...c4!?**. There was no real need for White to block the centre, so Adams' way of handling the position looks right to me. **19...e6 20 ♗b5 ♗e7 21 ♗g5 ♗f6 22 ♖d2 cxd4 23 cxd4 ♖fc8 24 a4 ♗a8** The fact that Black felt compelled to make such a move shows that his position is still mildly unpleasant. **25 ♖f4**



More accurate would have been **25 ♖ec1! ♖d8 26 ♖f4** when White maintains a pleasant edge. **25...d5!** Slaby chooses an opportune moment to block the centre and obtains some



Surprise defeats for top GMs such as Jon Speelman (left) and Mickey Adams (right) demonstrate just how tough the 4NCL (British Team League) is getting these days.

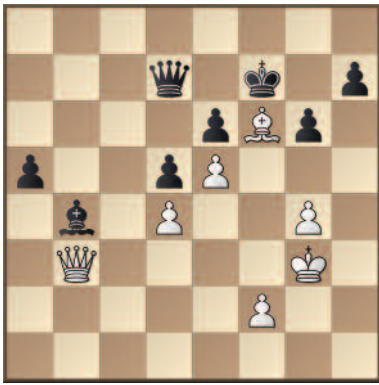
squares for his pieces. **26 e5 ♗e4 27 ♖ec1 ♖a7 28 g4!?** It is useful to control the f5 square. **28...♖xc1+** Black is too eager to exchange pieces. **28...♗ab8!** would have kept the position roughly level. **29 ♖xc1 ♖c8 30 ♖xc8+ ♗xc8 31 ♗d8!** Now White has some pressure again. **31...♗b6**



32 ♗g5 After **32 ♖c1!** the threat of a queen invasion with **♖c7** or **♖c6** is awkward, and according to the computer it is already time for Black to jettison a pawn with **32...♗c4 33 ♗xc4 dxc4 34 ♖xc4** when White has a clear edge. **32...♗xg5 33 ♗xg5 ♗c4** Now the game is equal again as the mutual weaknesses balance each other. White's bishop pair does not mean much, as the knight on c4 is stable and controls a lot of squares. A draw would be the natural outcome, but Adams falls into the classic trap of trying too hard to win against a lower-rated, but still highly capable player. **34 h4 ♗f8**



35 ♗f6?! It is around this stage that the game starts to turn in Black's favour. The text move is not a big mistake in itself, but it is symptomatic of the fact that White was not content with a draw. A natural end to the game would have been something like **35 ♗e8 ♗b4 36 ♖f6 ♗d2 37 ♖d8 ♗xg5 38 hxg5 ♖xd4** and it is time for White to take a perpetual. **35...♗a3 36 ♗d3 36 ♗e8 ♗c2 37 ♗d8 ♗xd4 38 ♗xf7+ ♖xf7 39 ♖xd4** is equal. **36...♖c7 37 ♖d2 ♗b4 38 ♖e3?** Now things start to become awkward for White. **38 ♖h6 ♗f8 39 ♖d2** repeats the position. **38...♖c3 39 h5 ♗c2!** Now White must lose a pawn on the queenside. **40 hxg6!?** Cute, but it does not solve White's problems. **40...fxg6** Black did not come this far to fall for **40...♗xe3?? 41 gxh7+**. **41 ♗xc2 ♖xc2 42 ♗g2 42 ♖h6 ♗f8** gets nowhere. **42...♖xa4 43 ♖d3 ♖c6 44 ♖b3 ♖d7 45 ♗g3 ♗f7**



46 ♔h4?! This active use of the king only leads to further problems. White should have preferred 46 ♕g5 when it is by no means easy for Black to force his a-pawn down the board while also keeping tabs on the kingside. **46...♞c6** **47 ♕g5 ♞d7** **48 ♕f6 h6** **49 ♞d3?** White should have preferred 49 ♔h3 to get the king out of harm's way. **49...♞c6!** The queen is headed for c3, after which White will not be able to cope with the threatened queen exchange combined with the checkmating ideas involving ...g5+. **50 ♞b3** White could have avoided the mating threats with 50 g5, but after 50...h5 Black gets a protected passed pawn and a blocked kingside, so White's drawing chances would be minimal here too. **50...♞c3 0-1**

Interestingly, Adams was not the only highly rated Pride & Prejudice player to suffer a dip in form. Witness the following encounter from board two, where David Howell lost to a player rated 2229.

Round 5 Pandor's Box - P&P
M.Capucci - D.Howell
English Opening

1 ♖f3 ♗f6 2 b3 g6 3 ♕b2 ♕g7 4 e3 0-0
5 ♕e2 b6 6 0-0 ♕b7 7 c4 c5 8 ♖c3 e6
9 d4 After a timid-looking opening, Capucci occupies the centre and obtains a relatively normal-looking position. **9...a6?!** A slightly odd choice. 9...d4 and; 9...d5 both look more logical. **10 dxc5 bxc5 11 ♞d6!** White seizes the opportunity to create threats against the vulnerable c5 pawn. **11...♞a5 12 ♞ad1 ♞d8 12...♗e8 13 ♞d2** d6 was safer. **13 ♗g5! h6 14 ♗a4!** Capucci finds a clever way to create problems by offering a pseudo knight sacrifice. **14...♞c8?!** 14...hxg5?? 15 ♕c3 traps the queen. The best defence was 14...♗e8! 15 ♞xc5 ♞xc5 16 ♗xc5 ♕xg2! 17 ♔xg2 ♕xb2 when Black is only slightly worse. **15 ♕f3!** Again White finds the most incisive continuation. **15...♕xf3 16 ♗xf3 ♞a7**



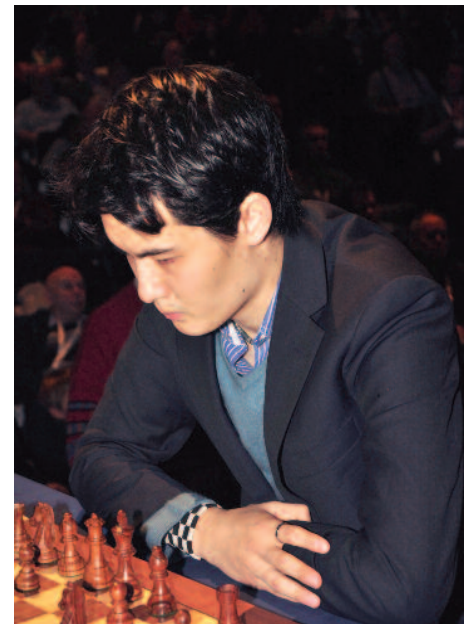
17 ♞e7! Another great move! The attack on the knight is hard to meet. **17...♞c7!?** Howell finds an imaginative defence, but it does not solve his problems. Most knight moves would have run into ♕xg7 followed by ♗e5, with powerful threats. **18 ♕e5 ♞b7?** Black should have preferred either 18...♞d8 19 ♞xd8+ ♞xd8 20 ♗xc5, or 18...♗c6 19 ♕xc7 ♗xe7 20 ♕d6, although in both cases he is a pawn down for no compensation. **19 ♗xc5 ♞b4 20 ♕xb8 ♞xb8 21 ♞d6** The immediate 21 ♗e5! would have been more accurate. **21...♞b6 22 ♞e7 ♞b8** 22...♔h7 would have given better chances to survive, but perhaps Howell thought his lower-rated opponent would chicken out and take a draw. **23 ♗e5!** No thanks! Capucci corrects his previous inaccuracy and secures a winning position. **23...♞f8 24 ♗c6! dxc6 25 ♞xa7**



White is now an exchange and a pawn up, and the rest is easy. **25...♞a3 26 ♞b6 a5 27 ♞xc6 ♞xa2 28 ♞a4 ♞b2 29 ♞xa5 ♔h7 30 ♞d2 ♞e5 31 ♞d4 ♞b8 32 ♞d6 ♞a8 33 ♞a1 ♞c8 34 ♞a7 ♗e8 35 ♞b6 ♗f6 36 ♞d1 e5 37 ♗d7 ♞d8 38 ♗xf6+ ♕xf6 39 ♞xf7+ ♔g8 40 ♞xd8+ 1-0**

A great game by the Brazilian player Marcos Capucci; once he got the initiative, he never let his opponent off the hook.

And there was more! One board further down, Gawain Jones got into terrible trouble against a player rated more than 400 points beneath him.



Ouch! English GM David Howell was 'given a Brazilian' by Marcos Capucci.

Round 5 P&P - Pandora's Box
G.Jones - M.Burrows
Closed Sicilian

1 e4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♗c6 3 ♗ge2 e5 4 ♗d5
d6 5 ♗ec3 ♕e6 6 a3 a6 7 b4 ♗f6
8 ♗xf6+ ♞xf6 9 ♗d5 ♞d8 10 ♞b1 ♕e7
11 bxc5 dxc5 12 ♗b6 ♞b8 13 ♕c4
♕xc4 14 ♗xc4 b5 15 ♗e3 0-0 16 d3
♕g5 17 0-0 ♕xe3 18 ♕xe3 ♞e7 19 f4
exf4 20 ♞xf4 ♞f8 21 ♞h5 ♗e5
22 ♞h4 h6



23 ♕xh6!? This certainly looks dangerous, but Black seems to have just enough defensive resources. If White plays more slowly with 23 ♞f1 then 23...♞b6! is a good reply, combining defence with activity. **23...gxh6 24 ♞xh6 ♗g6** According to the computer, Black could even have got away with the suicidal-looking 24...f6!? 25 ♞h8+ ♔f7, for instance 26 ♞h7+ ♔g6 27 ♞h6+ ♔g5 28 ♞h5+ ♔g6 with a possible perpetual. White has a few other ways of continuing the attack, but nothing decisive that I can see. **25 ♞h7+ ♔f8 26 ♞f1 ♔e8 27 ♞h5**



The one that got away: Martin Burrows very nearly landed a shark but he wriggled off the hook!



33...♖h6! Black's queen has taken a most unusual route around the board, but it has certainly proven effective. By now White's attack has almost run out of steam. 34 ♗e5+ If 34 ♖c8+ ♘d8 35 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 36 ♗g8 ♖g6!? 37 ♗xf7 ♔d7, Black's king is safe and his queenside pawns should carry the day. 34...♖e6 35 ♖c8+ ♘d8 36 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 37 ♗b8+ ♔e7



They seek him here, they seek him there - Gawain Jones escaped his opponent's clutches in Pimpernel fashion.



27...♔f8 27...♖b6!? also deserved attention. 28 ♗h8 ♖b6 29 ♖hf5 After 29 ♖e5 ♖e6 30 ♖ff5 ♖c8 31 ♖xe6 fxe6 32 ♗h5+ ♔d8 33 ♖f7 ♗d6 34 ♗g5+ ♔e8 White can force a draw but nothing more. 29...♖d7! 30 h4 After 30 ♖xf7 ♗xf7 31 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 Black will be the one trying to win the ending. 30 ♗h5!? may have been best, intending to meet 30...c4 with 31 d4. 30...c4! 31 d4



Black has done the hard work, and the win is within his grasp. But Gawain Jones is a tricky customer and he keeps fighting. 38 d5 ♔d7 39 ♗g8 39 ♖xf7+ ♔xf7 40 dxe6+ ♗xe6 is nothing. 39...♖f6 40 d6+! Gawain desperately gives up two more pawns in order to open as many lines as possible. It should not be enough to save the game, but it proved to be the best practical chance. 40...♔xd6 41 e5+

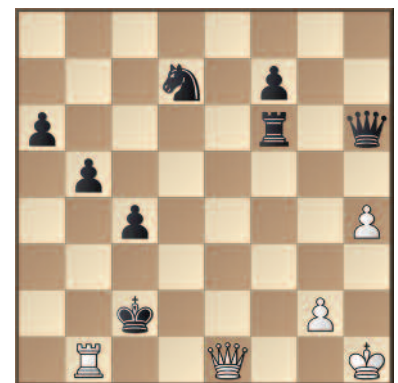


31...♗xa3! Burrows correctly judges that he can get away with this cheeky pawn grab. 31...♖e6! was also promising for Black. 32 ♖c5 ♗e3+ 33 ♔h1



41...♔xe5 41...♔xe5! was enough to win comfortably, despite the odd-looking king

position. 42 ♗d8+ ♔d7 42...♔e6! was more accurate, but to play it Black would have had to foresee the line 43 ♗b6+ ♔e7 44 ♗c5+ ♔d8! 45 ♖d1+ ♔d3! 46 cxd3 ♗xh4+ 47 ♔g1 c3! winning. 43 ♖d1+ ♔c5 44 ♗c7+?! White cannot take the knight due to ...♗xh4+ followed by ...♗f2+ and ...♖h6+ winning, but 44 g3! would have posed more problems. The best reply looks to be 44...♖e6 45 ♗xd7 ♗f6! when Black controls enough of the important squares to maintain decent winning chances. 44...♔b4 45 ♖b1+ ♔c3 46 ♗g3+ If 46 ♗a5+ ♔d4 47 ♖d1+ ♔e4! the king escapes. 46...♔xc2 47 ♖e1



According to the game score, Black now played 47...♖f1+? 1/2-1/2 and a draw was agreed as, after 48 ♗xf1 ♗xh4+ 49 ♔g1 ♗d4+, Black has a perpetual. (He can actually play for more, but if this was his intention there was no point in giving up his rook).

Nevertheless, the truth is that, despite Black's freakish king position, White had no immediate threats, and any sensible move would have led to an easily winning position, for instance 47...♖e6 48 ♗d1+

♔c3 when White can do nothing. Gawain must have breathed a sigh of relief at the end, and Martin must have been kicking himself after checking the final position with a computer, but still, a draw with the black pieces against one of the country's top players is not all doom and gloom.

Fortunately for Pride & Prejudice, the remaining results were heavily in their favour. On the Sunday they overcame their sternest test of the season so far in Barbican 1, thus maintaining their 100% record of match wins this season. Most other matches also went according to seeding, with few upsets occurring. One of the most impressive results came from Cheddleton, who scored an impressive four wins and four draws against The ADs despite an almost identical average rating.

Pool A of Division 1 features a tight battle for the fourth championship spot. After six rounds Pride & Prejudice, Barbican 1 and Betsson have all qualified comfortably, leaving WGHK 2 and Cheddleton fighting for the remaining space. At this stage in the competition the latter is one point in front, but faces tougher opposition in the crucial seventh round.

WGHK 2 fought to a tough 4-4 draw with The ADs in round six. The match looked as if it might go either way at various times, and a draw was probably fair to both teams in the end. Along the way I was able to win a nice game on board two, which featured an interesting, and completely accidental, new approach in a topical opening.

Round 6 WGHK 2 - The ADs

A.Greet - J.Jirka

Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♚f6 4 e3 ♙f5

5 ♘c3 e6 This took me by surprise.

According to the database Jirka usually plays 5...a6 and most of my rushed preparation time was devoted to this.

6 ♘h4 ♙e4 6...♙g6 is the other big main line. **7 f3 ♙g6 8 ♖b3 ♖b6 9 ♗xg6** White is more or less forced to exchange now, otherwise ...♖xb3 followed by ...♙c2

might prove troublesome. **9...hxg6**

10 ♙d2 ♙d6



Andrew Greet made an accidental contribution to opening theory in his round six game.

Another surprise. I assumed my opponent would opt for the main line of 10...♗bd7, and was doing my best to recall what little I knew about this position when the bishop eagerly emerged. At this point I was completely 'out of book'. I knew that the bishop development was slightly unusual at this stage, so I asked myself what possible drawbacks my opponent's last move might entail. The obvious point that sprang to mind was that the bishop is stepping into a potential fork. Thus after checking a few variations and satisfying myself that everything was in order, I contentedly played... **11 c5!**? This pawn sacrifice gives White promising compensation and relatively easy play in the queenless middlegame. Therefore I was more than a little shocked when a post-game database search revealed that the idea was almost completely new! 11 f4 is the normal move, when c5 remains a positional threat which will no longer entail a pawn sacrifice. 11...♗bd7 (but the more recent idea of 11...♙e7!? looks like a better try) 12 c5 ♖xb3 13 axb3 ♙e7 14 b4 gives White a clear plus. 11 0-0-0!? has been played in a few games, but I wanted to have my rook on the a-file after the queen exchange. **11...♖xb3 12 axb3 ♖xh2 12...♙xh2!**? would have given me a difficult choice. The simple option is 13 ♗d1, sidestepping the potential bishop check and preparing b4-b5 with compensation, much like the game. The more ambitious and riskier option is 13 ♗e2!?, with ideas of g3 trapping the bishop. Black should respond with 13...g5!, leading to a strange situation where White cannot win the bishop by force, but Black equally has a hard time freeing it. **13 ♖xh2 ♙xh2**



14 b4 Funnily enough, the only other game to feature 11 c5!? took place just three weeks before this one: 14 ♙d3!? ♙c7 15 b4 a6 16 b5 e5 17 g4!? g5 18 ♗f2 cxb5 19 e4?! (19 ♗xb5) 19...♗bd7? (19...dxe4) 20 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 21 exd5 exd4 22 d6 ♗xc5 23 ♙xb5+ ♗d8 24 ♙xg5+ f6 25 dxc7+ ♗xc7 26 ♙f4+ ♗b6 27 ♙e2 and White went on to win with his extra piece, Markus – Simonian, Nova Gorica 2011. Another possibility is 14 ♗f2, threatening g3 while preventing the bishop check, and intending to meet 14...♙c7 with 15 b4 with similar play to the game. **14...♙g3+** **15 ♗d1 e5** Black wants to generate some counterplay, but he risks allowing the d5 pawn to become weak. **16 b5 exd4 17 exd4 cxb5!** Black must have been concerned about b6, but it feels wrong to allow a white piece to develop with gain of tempo. 17...a6 was more resilient. **18 ♙xb5+ ♗c6**



19 ♗a2!? This tricky move was the product of a long period of thought. Although it feels as though White should have promising compensation, it is not easy to breach Black's defences. For instance, the direct 19 ♙xc6+ bxc6 20 ♖a6 achieves nothing: after 20...♗d7 21 ♗a2 ♗g8 Black defends successfully and will soon turn his attention to the kingside, where he has an extra pawn. 19 ♙g5 can be met by 19...a6, or 19...♗h7!? 20 ♙e3 ♗f6. **19...0-0-0?** Black overlooks a crucial tactic. The position is tricky for him, but if he plays accurately he should be OK. 19...♗e7?! 20 ♙xc6 bxc6 21 ♗b4 ♗d7 22 ♖a6 ♖c8 23 ♖xa7+



Luke McShane brought his London Classic/Wijk aan Zee form to the 4NCL in February.

and Black is in trouble. If 19...♔d7 20 ♖b4 White wins a pawn on the queenside, as 20...♗c7 21 ♕xc6 bxc6 22 ♖a6 ♖b7 23 ♖xc6 a5?! fails after 24 ♖b6+. The best defence was 19...♗g8! when the knight will shore up Black's weak points from e7. In this case White keeps a pawn's worth of compensation, but nothing much beyond that. 20 ♕xc6 bxc6 Oddly enough, the computer points out that there is still an extraordinary way for Black to keep himself in the game: 20...♖h8!! when, after 21 ♕xb7+ (21 ♖c1 bxc6 22 ♖xa7, White has a clear advantage but no direct win.) 21...♗xb7 22 ♗e2. 21 ♖b4



21...♔d7 After my last move my opponent's head sank into his hands as he realised that his intended 21...♗b7 is refuted by 22 ♖xa7+! when White wins the house. His chosen move is not much better, and allows a cute finish. 22 ♖xa7+ ♕c7 23 ♖a6 ♖c8 24 ♕a5 ♖e8 25 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 26 ♖4 Black is paralysed, as his knight will remain trapped in a permanent pin from either the rook or the bishop.

26...g5 27 ♗c2 1-0

Wood Green Hilsmark 1 continued to keep pace with Pride & Prejudice, defeating White Rose by a comfortable margin. They were helped by the presence of an in-form Luke McShane, who has produced a couple of truly world-class performances in recent months in London and Wijk aan Zee. Here is Luke's game from Round 6.

Round 6 WGHK 1 - White Rose L. McShane - R. Palliser Closed Sicilian

1 e4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♖c6 3 ♗ge2 ♖f6 4 g3 g6 5 ♕g2 ♕g7 6 a3!? With this rather unusual move Luke avoids most theory and aims to set his opponent some unusual problems. 6...d6 7 ♖b1 ♖d4 8 0-0



If 8 ♖b4 Black may have been tempted to try 8...♕g4!? 8...h5!? Richard is a Sicilian expert and he decides to embark on this double-edged pawn

thrust. 9 h4 It remains to be seen which side is more likely to benefit from the inclusion of the last two moves. 9...♗g4 Another idea was 9...♕g4!? 10 f3 ♕d7 10 d3 e6 11 ♗f4 ♕d7 12 ♖h3!? Luke brings his knight closer to the g5 square. In a closed position the players can afford the time for such manoeuvres. 12...♗c7 13 ♕d2 ♕c6 14 ♖e2 b6



With hindsight, 14...♖xe2+ 15 ♗xe2 0-0 would have given Black a bit more breathing space and avoided the problems that occurred in the game. 15 ♗ef4! Avoiding the knight exchange and preparing to push Black back in the centre. 15...♕b7 16 c3 ♖c6 17 ♗g5 ♗d7 18 ♕h3! Gradually all White's manoeuvres are beginning to make sense. Now he takes aim at the e6 square. 18...♖d8



19 f3 Luke decides to play in the centre. White could have taken a pawn with 19 ♕xg4 hxg4 20 ♗xg4, but his weakened light squares would have offered Black some compensation. Another idea was 19 ♖b4!?, when Black must pay attention to the queenside as well. 19...♖f6 19...♖e5? is asking for trouble due to 20 d4 followed by d5. 20 d4 cxd4 21 cxd4 d5 Black's choices were limited, as d5 was a serious threat. 21...♖h7 may have just been playable, although after 22 d5 (22 ♖xh7? ♕xd4+) 22...♖xg5 23 hxg5 h4 24 ♖g2! Black is under some pressure. 22 e5 ♖h7 23 ♖xh7 ♖xh7 24 ♕e3 ♖c6



25 b4! White has a comfortable space advantage and Black's king lacks a safe haven. White already has good control over the kingside, and he now increases his influence on the opposite flank.

25...d7 26 Wd3 a6 27 e2! The knight has done its work so Luke prepares to find a new role for it while also opening the path for the bishop to go to the kingside. **27...h6** The dark-squared bishop had few prospects, so Black decides to exchange it. On the other hand his kingside dark squares now become weak. **28 xh6 Bxh6 29 fxc1 xc6 30 c3**



30...f5?! Black should not have allowed this knight to be exchanged for White's worst minor piece, especially as it involves some damage to his pawn structure. The best defence was **30...h8** intending ...f8-g7, when Black is worse but still in the game. **31 f2 e7 32 d2 Bh8 33 xf5!** Now White gets everything he could wish for: a good knight versus a bad bishop, and enemy weaknesses on both

sides of the board. **33...gxf5** After **33...exf5** White has several tempting continuations including **34 e4!?**, **34 a4** and **34 b5 axb5 35 b5 xxb5 36 Bxb5**. **34 a4 34 e4!?** is the computer's top choice, but White is already strategically winning so there was no need for such shenanigans. **34...f8 35 b5 axb5 36 axb5 e8**



37 e2! The knight vacates the c-file and prepares to take up residence on the ideal f4 square. **37...f6** This creates additional weaknesses and leads to a quick end, but the position was already beyond repair. In the event of a quieter move such as **37...g7**, White can simply play **38 c2** and prepare an invasion at his leisure. **38 exf6 Wxf6 39 c7 g8 40 Bb7** White wins a pawn and keeps his huge positional advantage. **40...Bh7 41 Bxb6 Bha7 42 Bb2 d7 43 f4 Ba4 44 Bxh5 Wh8 45 Bb7 1-0**

This was a fine game from Luke, who defeated a tough opponent in a manner that appeared almost effortless. Wood Green 1 won the match convincingly. Most other matches in Pool B went according to seeding, although e2e4.org.uk 1 and Oxford 1 deserve a mention for their defeats of the higher-rated Guildford 1 and Barbican 2 respectively. A glance at the score-tables reveals that the season is shaping up to be a two-horse race, as expected. So far the only thing separating Wood Green 1 and Pride & Prejudice is a few extra game points in favour of the former, but I hardly need state that this could easily change. Rounds seven and eight take place later in March. For more information visit: www.4ncl.co.uk

Team	P	W	D	L	GP	pts
Pride & Prejudice	6	6	0	0	36	12
Barbican 4NCL 1	6	4	1	1	32	9
Betsson.com	6	4	1	1	29	9
Cheddleton 1	6	3	0	3	26½	6
Wood Green Hilsmark 2	6	2	1	3	22	5
The AD's	6	2	1	3	20	5
Warwickshire Select 1	6	1	0	5	16	2
Pandora's Box Grantham	6	0	0	6	10½	0

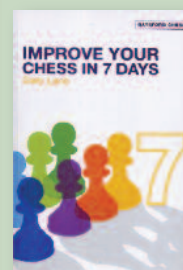
Team	P	W	D	L	GP	pts
Wood Green Hilsmark 1	6	6	0	0	38½	12
e2e4.org.uk 1	6	5	0	1	28	10
White Rose 1	6	3	1	2	22	7
Guildford A&DC 1	6	3	0	3	25	6
Oxford 1	6	3	0	3	22	6
Cambridge University 1	6	2	1	3	21½	5
Barbican 4NCL 2	6	1	0	5	18	2
Sambuca Sharks	6	0	0	6	16½	0

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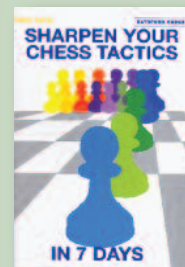
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