

A New Season

The 4NCL returned to action, but will Guildford simply stroll to another title?

The 4NCL returned to Hinckley Island in mid-November for a new season, if one which hadn't started as smoothly as usual. Now comprising of 89 teams, strains on the national league's usual excellent level of organisation became apparent throughout October as captains waited in vain for the fixtures to be made and published. Perhaps this wasn't such a problem for that large majority of amateur sides, but for those like Guildford's Roger Emerson it posed a major dilemma: how strong to make one's first team with the opposition unknown?

To be fair to the 4NCL, with its generally excellent team of arbiters, proceedings went off without a glitch during the opening weekend of play, although just a couple of days prior to that, to the amazement of many, the belatedly-published fixtures had been amended. That resulted in Barbican I and II swapping pools, creating havoc for their own preparation, as well as for those teams expecting to face them.

It transpired that the arbiters had access to the correct fixtures, but that an incorrect version had somehow been published on the 4NCL's website. Quite why the incorrect but widely circulated version couldn't be stuck with was slightly baffling, not least on practical grounds. Moreover, Barbican II had even finished ahead of their first team last season, so were not without worthy claims to be the one seeded Barbican side. As chief arbiter David Welch had to admit, it was not the 4NCL's most glorious moment.

With the 4NCL rumoured to be back on the road next season, one wonders if the powers that be may even revert to 12-team all-play-all, thereby negating the potentially sub-optimal seeding system currently in use to accommodate 16 teams in each of the top two flights. At any rate, one hopes that organisational levels will improve, which surely they will considering how well run the league has been for the last 15 years or so.

A Strong Start for the Champions

The removal of Barbican I from Pool B would appear to have left both Cheddleton and defending champions Guildford with just one tricky fixture, against each other. Unfortunately for the league, long-time leading club Wood Green have lost their sponsorship, which may turn the 2014/15 season into something of a Guildford procession. If that isn't to be,

Cheddleton will have to cause an upset, which seems unlikely, although they have at least added David Howell to their mainly-GM ranks.

Led by Matthew Sadler, Guildford deposed of both Hackney and e2e4.org 6½-1½. Sadler made 2/2, including a long grind against Stuart Conquest, as did Jean-Pierre le Roux and Dagne Ciuksyte, while Nick Pert showed that Avrukh's approach against the Slav continues to pack a certain punch.

N.Pert-T.Eden Guildford I vs Hackney Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 c4 c6 4 e3 ♙f5 5 ♙c3 e6 6 ♘h4 ♙g6 7 ♖b3!?

Back in 2008 in *Grandmaster Repertoire 1 - 1.d4 Volume One*, Boris Avrukh actually preferred 7 ♙e2 ♘bd7 8 0-0, but matters may not be so clear after the aggressive 8...♙e4. In any case, an early ♖b3 features in a lot of Avrukh's other anti-Slav lines and the resulting positions should be familiar to all disciples of his fine work.

7...♗b6

The majority of strong players have preferred 7...♗c7 when the Catalanque 8 ♘xg6 hxg6 9 g3 ♘bd7 10 ♙g2 is White's intention. Then, for instance, 10...♙e7 11 0-0 0-0 12 cxd5 exd5 13 f3 b5 14 ♙e2 ♗b6 15 ♘h1 c5 16 ♗d1 ♗fe8 17 g4 was Nimzo or QGD-like and perhaps a touch better for White, who went on to win in Giri-Motylev, Biel 2014.

8 ♘xg6 hxg6 9 ♙d2 ♘bd7 10 ♙d3 ♗xb3?!?

I'm rarely convinced by this exchange apart from when White has already traded off his c-pawn, meaning that the resulting doubled pawns are isolated. Many Slav players assume that the trade is good as White can no longer attack (c4-c5 followed by b4-b5 isn't an issue), but c4 is supported and the pawns control a number of useful squares.

Back in the day, 10...♙e7 11 h3 ♗c8 was preferred in Dreev-Gelfand, Groningen 1997, and even here one might make a good case for 10...♗c7!? 11 h3 ♙e7, simply asking White what his plan is.

11 axb3 a6 12 h3



Pert cuts out any trouble on the kingside, having realised that his king may wish to reside there.

12...0-0-0

Another issue with exchanging queens is that it makes it hard to free Black's position with the standard breaks: for instance, 12...♙d6 13 0-0 dxc4 14 bxc4 e5 15 ♗fe1 undoubles the pawns and leaves White in control of the centre, while 12...c5 13 cxd5 exd5 14 ♙e2!? already eyes quick pressure against the newly created weakness on d5.

13 0-0!

Various engines I consulted here wanted to play something like 13 c5!? e5 14 b4 ♘b8 15 f3. This isn't as ridiculous as it looks; at some point ♙xa6 may become an issue and White



All smiles from Nick Pert as he started off his 4NCL campaign with a victory.

can hope to gradually inch forward on the kingside. However, with a 350-point rating advantage, why close the position? Pert indeed prefers to manoeuvre and does so deftly.

13...♗d6 14 ♖fd1 ♙c7

This may feel slow, but in the event of 14...g5 15 f3 ♖h5 White can up the ante with 16 cxd5! exd5 17 e4.

15 ♙e1!

White hasn't 'castled into it' as f2-f3 will always hold up any ...g5-g4 intention. Tied in with that the bishop will cover the g3-square.

15...g5 16 f3 ♖h5 17 ♖e2

Fine prophylaxis. White will now look to the e3-e4 break and the tricky issue for Eden is how to obtain counterplay without opening lines for the white bishops.

17...g6

Black waits. A sensible policy. Some would have rushed headfirst with 17...f5?, but after 18 cxd5 there's only one good way to recapture and 18...cxd5 19 b4 would see White attacking on the queenside after all.



18 e4!?

The grandmaster wants to create some direct problems, but this was certainly ambitious. White might instead have continued to manoeuvre with, say, 18 ♙f2 when 18...f5 19 g4!? ♖hf6 20 ♖g2 would be a radical but possibly decent way to hold the kingside.

18...dxe4 19 fxe4

Pert must have looked long and hard at 19 ♙xe4 f5 20 ♙c2 e5 and concluded, correctly it seems, that Black is obtaining enough counterplay: for example, 21 ♙f2 exd4 22 ♙xd4 (or 22 ♙xd4 ♖f4 when the white king suddenly isn't looking so happy) 22...♖he8 23 ♖d2 ♙e5, forcing a positionally desirable trade of bishops.

19...c5

Far from bad, but 19...g4! would have been consistent and another stiff test of White's play. After 20 hxg4? ♖hf6 21 g5 ♖g4 the king's rook will spring to h5, so I suspect that 20 b4! was Pert's intention. Anything might have happened after 20...gxh3 21 gxh3 g5 22 b5 and even if detailed analysis revealed White to be slightly for choice, there's no doubt he has lost the control which Pert had initially strived so hard for.

20 dxc5!?

Not the most obvious move perhaps, but White needs to open lines for his bishops, not create squares for Black with 20 d5 ♙e5.

20...♗xc5 21 ♙c2

You may be wondering about the open

lines, but the bishop is quite safe here and b3-b4 will give it some oxygen.

21...e5

Eden hopes to sink his knight into d4, which makes a lot of sense. After the slightly grovelling 21...♗xd1 22 ♗xd1 ♖d8 23 ♗xd8+ ♖xd8 24 ♖f2 Black might have held, or White might gradually have put his bishops to good use. The best move, though, was 21...♖f6! and if 22 ♖c3 (22 ♙c3 e5 is now well timed) 22...g4, resuming the attack.

22 b4 ♖e6



23 b5?!

Pert plays for the attack. It was also tempting to go forwards with 23 c5 ♖d4 24 ♖xd4 exd4 25 ♙b3, but this isn't such a stable edge in view of 25...♖f4, teeing up ...g4 ideas once again. With Black's bishop currently a little out of play, a case might also be made for 23 ♙c3!?, and if 23...g4 24 hxg4 ♖f6 25 c5 ♖xg4 26 ♙b3, which is messy, but should favour White if he can retain control. In any event, the bold text might well have backfired.

23...♙b6+ 24 ♙f2 ♙xf2+ 25 ♖xf2 axb5 26 cxb5

Both sides could have played fractionally stronger moves at various stages, but the game has been well fought and could still go either way. Black would love to remove all the rooks and a pair of knights, leaving White with a bad bishop, but before the endgame the Gods have placed the middlegame. It's impossible to believe that Black can be worse here, but his king is more exposed than it seems Eden realised.

26...♖c7

Played to avoid any back-rank issues after b5-b6; ...♖hf4 can wait a move.

27 ♙b3 ♖hf4 28 ♖c3



Naturally White has no desire to swap knights and prefers to eye the hole on d5.

28...f6?

You only need to give one chance to a GM and they invariably pounce. Eden has played well up to here, but this unnecessary defensive move changes everything. Black should have preferred 28...♖d4 when 29 ♖d5+ ♖d6 is nothing to worry about, whereas ...♖d3+ may well cause trouble. Likewise, I would slightly prefer to take Black after 28...♖d4, since 29 ♙xf7? ♖df8 30 ♙c4 ♖fe2+ 31 ♖e1 ♖xc3 32 bxc3 ♖c2+ is not what White wants to be doing.

29 ♖xe6!

Not so much exchanging off a potentially bad piece as prepared to bring White's own knight to a monster outpost.

29...♖xe6?

The natural move, but if Black had sensed things had already gone wrong, he might have paused and preferred 29...♗xd1 30 ♗xd1 ♖xe6. Then 31 ♖d5+ ♖b8 leaves White pressing after, say, 32 ♖e7, but is also far preferable to the course of the game for the defender.

30 ♖d5+ ♖b8

30...♖d7!? was a radical try, but with 31 ♗a7!? ♖c5 32 ♖e3 White would have threatened 33 b4, with a rather nasty initiative.

31 b6



Pert begins to nail down the coffin around the black king.

31...♗c8

I'd be amazed if Black could survive this in a practical setting, but perhaps 31...♖d6!? 32 ♗a5 (and not 32 ♗a7? ♗xb6) 32...♗c8 was worth a try, running away in the event of 33 ♗da1 ♗c2+ 34 ♖g1 ♖c8.

32 ♖g1 ♖hf8 33 ♖f1

After such a complex fight, both players may well have been living only on the 30-second increment by this point. There was nothing wrong with the immediate 33 ♗a7, but Pert prefers to target f6.

33...♖f4 34 ♗a5

Black would have had some chances to mount a long defence after 34 ♖c7 ♗xc7 35 bxc7+ ♖xc7 36 ♗fd1 ♖e2+ 37 ♖f2 ♖d4, but 34 ♖e7! would have been strong: for example, 34...♗ce8 (or 34...♗c2 35 ♗f3 ♗xg2+ 36 ♖h1 ♗xb2 37 ♗fa3 ♗xb6 38 ♗a8+ ♖c7 39 ♗xf8, bagging a whole rook) 35 ♗a7 ♗xe7 36 ♗fa1 ♖c8 37 ♗a8+ ♖d7 38 ♗xf8 ♖e6 39 ♖d1 and White's rooks should prove too active.

34...♖cd8?

Remarkable as it may seem, Black could still have put up a lot of resistance after 34...♗xd5 35 exd5 ♖cd8 36 ♖a7 f5!, and if 37 ♖fa1 ♗c8 38 ♖c1+ ♗b8 39 ♖c7 ♖xd5 40 ♖xb7+ ♗c8 41 ♖g7 ♗b8. The text simply loses.

35 ♗e7! 1-0

Removing the c8-square from the black king. There's nothing good to be done about 36 ♖fa1 followed by mate.

Oxford have long been known as giant killers and went close yet again on their return to Division One, only going down 4½-3½ to Cheddleton. David Howell, Jonathan Hawkins and Keith Arkell scored smooth victories on the top three boards for the pro-team, while Jovica Radovanovic chipped in with a win lower down. Oxford replied through Tom Eckersley-Waites, who outplayed David Eggleston, Marcus Harvey, the recipient of an overly optimistic Simon Williams piece sacrifice, and Aidan Rawlinson who attacked with some verve.

Unfortunately for the Dark Blues, new Cheddleton captain Fiona Steil-Antoni was able to force a draw after the time control on bottom board and so secure victory. Whereas Guildford I averaged 2544 across their 8 boards, Cheddleton's average rating was 2383. No mean effort, but they will have to strengthen somewhat to even remotely trouble the champions. Indeed, Cheddleton only won on the Sunday against Grantham Sharks again by the narrowest of margins, partly due to Peter Batchelor claiming the scalp of Keith Arkell.

Cambridge began the season without their invariable top boards, Karl Mah and Eddie Dearing, but have made a couple of canny signings, bringing in John-Paul Wallace from Hackney and the mercurial Jack Rudd from Bristol. The Light Blues began in the best possible fashion, edging out e2e4.org 4½-3½ thanks to wins on the lower boards from Carl Spencer and Sabrina Chevannes. Even more importantly for their quest to land up in the championship pool after 7 rounds, they then dispatched newly-promoted Hackney 5½-2½.

Win, lose or draw, Dan Bisby's Dutch and King's Indian games are always worth a look. I hesitate to show another loss for Tomer Eden, who played many, many better moves than your scribe during the weekend, but the following is rather instructive as well as entertaining.

T.Eden-D.Bisby Hackney vs Cambridge



After spending the whole game trying to land a blow, Black has finally just broken through on the kingside with 43...♖xf2. Eden's knight retreat, while understandable, wasn't the best response and now 44...♗xd4! 45 ♗xf2 ♖xf2 46 ♗e3 ♖f8 would have left everything to play for. Black is the exchange and a pawn down, but may even be for choice on account of the large threat of 46...♖b2. 44...♖c2 was also reasonable, but instead Bisby elected to remove a defender.

44...♖xg2+? 45 ♗xg2 ♖g4?!

I dare say that at this point Black also looked at 45...♗d5!?, but feared he'd come up short if White just took everything with 46 exd5 ♗xd5+ 47 ♗g1 ♗xd4+ 48 ♗e3 ♖f3 49 ♗xe5. Still that or the simple 45...♗xd4 should really have been preferred.



After the text Black threatens 46...♖f3+ 47 ♗g1 ♗xd4+. How would you defend?

46 ♗c5??

The knight returns to its former duty, blocking the key dark-square diagonal, but Eden has missed a vicious shot. Correct was the calm 46 ♗xe5 when it's hard to even suggest a move for Black. Everything is covered. Calmly removing the threat with 46 ♗d2 would also have done the trick, and if 46...♗xd4 47 ♖xe7 ♖f7 48 ♖b4 ♗xa1 49 ♗f2.

46...♗d5!!

A bolt from the blue. Black introduces another piece into the attack and suddenly finds himself with a decisive initiative.

47 ♖d2

It's also rather hard to see how White would have survived after 47 exd5 ♖f3+ 48 ♗g1 (or 48 ♗h3 ♗xd5 49 ♖xe5 ♖g2+ 50 ♗h4 ♗d8+) 48...♗xd5 49 ♗e4 ♗xd4+ 50 ♖xd4 exd4.

47...♗f4+ 48 ♗f2

Otherwise it could easily have been mate: 48 ♗h1 ♖f3+ 49 ♗g1 ♗h3# or 48 ♗g1 ♗h3+ 49 ♗g2 ♗xc5 50 dxc5 ♖f3+!

48...♗e2+ 0-1

49 ♗g2 ♖f3+ spells the end. A horrible turnaround for Eden, who had defended well for a long time, but also a reminder of the practical sting ever present in such direct kingside attacks.

In contrast to Cambridge, Barbican II began in the worst possible fashion as the effects of pairing mistreatment were all too apparent. The side who enjoyed an excellent 2013/14 season went down 5-3 to the Sharks, despite Graham Morrison deftly punishing an early pawn grab, and then lost a close encounter by the same margin to Oxford. Short of time Neil Berry miscalculated in a winning pawn ending, which let the ever tricky Eckersley-Waites off the hook, while Ingrid Lauterbach couldn't convert an extra pawn against Francesca Matta on bottom board. That said, Oxford deserved the two points, fighting to the maximum on almost every board, and being rewarded with wins for Justin Tan, David Martins and Jonathan Manley.

H.Grund-G.Morrison Grantham Sharks vs Barbican II *Sicilian Defence*

1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 e6 3 c3 d5 4 e5

White declines the exchange on d5 and a standard c3 Sicilian, hoping to reach an Advance French after 4...♗c6 5 d4. Morrison, however, has other ideas.



Graham Morrison – always a tough opponent and very well prepared.

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4...d4!

A bold gain of space and the critical test of White's set-up.

5 cxd4

Grund takes up the challenge, but it's hard to be fully convinced by the pawn grab. Instead, 5 $\text{e}3$? $\text{c}6$ 6 0-0 followed by $\text{e}4$ and/or $\text{a}3$ -c4 is the modern interpretation.

5...cxd4 6 $\text{e}5$ + $\text{e}7$

Much better to sacrifice a pawn than suffer positionally after 6... $\text{c}6$?! 7 $\text{e}5$ + $\text{b}c6$ 8 $\text{a}4$ $\text{d}5$ 9 0-0.

7 $\text{d}4$?! $\text{e}5$ 8 $\text{d}5$ $\text{c}6$ 9 0-0 a6 10 $\text{c}5$



White would be fine if Black now had nothing better than regaining his pawn on e5, but Morrison has no intention of allowing a freeing d2-d4. Black may be a pawn down, but he already enjoys a pleasant small advantage in my view, thanks to the holes down the d-file, White's congested queenside and the weakness on e5.

10... $\text{e}7$ 11 $\text{e}1$

Neither was 11 $\text{a}3$ $\text{f}5$ 12 $\text{c}2$ $\text{c}5$ 13 $\text{e}4$?! $\text{d}4$ 14 $\text{d}6$ + $\text{d}6$ 15 $\text{d}4$ $\text{d}4$ 16 $\text{e}6$ $\text{d}6$ a success story for White in Torre-Hubner, Novi Sad Olympiad 1990.

11... $\text{g}6$ 12 $\text{a}3$!

Exchanging further structural unpleasantness for some play on the b-file. Instead, 12 b3 $\text{e}7$ 13 $\text{a}3$ 0-0 was all too easy for Black in Kharlov-Gheorghiu, Bern 1992. Note the date of these game references. If you like 3 c3 and also the Advance French for White, the modern 5 $\text{e}3$ really is the move.

12... $\text{e}3$ 13 $\text{b}3$ 0-0 14 $\text{b}1$ b5 15 $\text{h}5$?

This doesn't lead anywhere, but it's not so easy to suggest a good plan. Grund must have been dismayed with how much play and control Black had obtained with his early sacrifice. Another idea was 15 a4, but 15...b4 16 $\text{e}2$ $\text{g}5$ 17 d4 $\text{c}4$ just looks like a pretty grim IQP position for White.

15... $\text{h}5$

Taking advantage of the hole, but even stronger would have been 15... $\text{f}4$! 16 $\text{g}4$ $\text{d}3$, and if 17 $\text{e}3$ $\text{c}5$ 18 $\text{g}3$ $\text{d}4$ 19 $\text{e}2$ $\text{c}5$.

16 $\text{b}3$ $\text{d}4$ 17 $\text{b}2$

White's shimmy with his rook has saved the e5-pawn, but Black is after much more than just that pawn. He wants to retain full

control before increasing the pressure and emphasising just how awful White's dormant bishop is.

17... $\text{a}8$ 18 $\text{h}4$!

Semi-desperation and perhaps 18 $\text{e}3$ $\text{c}4$ 19 $\text{b}1$ to at least get in $\text{b}2$ was a better try, if still extremely grim for White.

18... $\text{c}2$ 19 $\text{f}1$ $\text{c}4$



All that h4 has done is create another target for Black. Morrison is quick to take advantage.

20 $\text{g}3$ $\text{d}4$!

Its disruptive job done on c2, the knight heads to join in what will be a decisive attack.

21 $\text{g}2$ $\text{f}5$ 22 $\text{e}2$?

The queen isn't safe here either, but likewise, 22 $\text{h}1$ $\text{f}4$ +! 23 $\text{g}1$ $\text{e}5$ would have been total annihilation.

22... $\text{f}4$ +! 23 $\text{h}1$ $\text{f}5$ 24 $\text{h}2$ $\text{f}3$ + 25 $\text{g}2$ $\text{g}4$ +!

Finishing crisply. 26 $\text{h}1$ $\text{h}3$ # 0-1

J.Manley-T.Chapman
Oxford vs Barbican II
Philidor Defence

1 $\text{e}4$ $\text{d}6$ 2 $\text{d}4$ $\text{f}6$ 3 $\text{c}3$ $\text{e}5$ 4 $\text{f}3$ $\text{b}7$ 5 $\text{c}4$ $\text{e}7$ 6 0-0

This allows a "trendy new line", as pointed out by Parimarjan Negi. As such, 6 a4!? is his recommendation in *Grandmaster Repertoire: 1.e4 vs The French, Caro-Kann and Philidor*. This was actually seen in another game played on the same day at Hinckley Island and after 6...0-0 7 0-0 a6 8 a5 h6 9 h3 $\text{e}4$ 10 $\text{d}4$ $\text{e}5$ 11 $\text{a}2$ c5 12 $\text{d}2$ $\text{c}6$ 13 $\text{f}4$ $\text{a}5$ 14 $\text{g}6$ $\text{e}8$ 15 $\text{f}4$ (all as given by Negi) 15... $\text{c}6$ 16 $\text{e}7$ + $\text{e}7$ 17 $\text{d}6$ White had regained his pawn with a modest but pleasant edge, and went on to grind out the win in Adair-Milliet, 4NCL 2014.

6... $\text{b}6$!

The aforementioned trendy line. Chapman eschews the long manoeuvring game which the traditional 6...c6 7 a4 0-0 tends to lead to.

7 $\text{e}2$

Invariably played. 7 $\text{b}3$ is actually not so ridiculous though, so long as White meets 7... $\text{e}4$ with 8 $\text{d}4$.

7... $\text{e}4$ 8 $\text{d}4$ 0-0 9 a4 a5 10 $\text{f}4$



Aggressive, tempting and a critical test of Black's set-up.

10... $\text{d}5$!

A natural counterstrike and a move which makes full use of the knight being on b6, but unfortunately it also appears to ask too much of Black's set-up. Instead, he should tidy his position with 10... $\text{e}8$ 11 $\text{f}3$ $\text{f}8$, or go 10...c6 11 $\text{f}3$ $\text{e}8$, which also seems reasonable enough for the second player, if still a touch better for White after 12 b3.

11 $\text{e}5$ $\text{e}4$ 12 $\text{f}5$!

The Editor of *Kingpin* never needs a second invitation to attack as it becomes apparent that f5-f6 is going to wreak havoc.

12... $\text{c}3$?

White's central set-up is secure after this, so Black really had to prefer 12... $\text{c}5$ 13 $\text{f}6$ $\text{g}6$, no matter how risky and ugly it looked. There is a big hole on g7, but ... $\text{e}8$ and ... $\text{f}8$ will ensure that a mating attack won't be a formality for White.

13 $\text{b}3$ $\text{c}5$!

Chapman will play many better games. Matters were already bad, but now Manley can strike.

14 $\text{f}6$! $\text{g}6$

This leads to a rout, but 14... $\text{c}4$ 15 $\text{f}7$ $\text{e}7$ 16 $\text{a}3$ picks up the exchange.

15 $\text{d}3$!



We could almost be back in the nineteenth century. As White has realised, there's nothing Black can do about h7.

15... $\text{f}5$

15... $\text{c}4$ 16 $\text{h}5$ would have been an immediate kill, but the text runs into a deadly Greek Gift.



J. Pein-K. Bhatia Wood Green vs Barbican I



Black had been suffering from cramp in an Exchange Lopez, but now spotted a way to break out.

20...xf3
Forcing the pace, although it was also possible to reach the game position via 20...xf4!? 21 gxf4 xf3 22 xf3 g4+ 23 f2.

21 xf3 g4 22 f2
22 e5 would have kept White's king safe, but also cost a clear pawn after 22...fxe5 23 fxe5 xe5.

22...xf4!
The star follow-up to Black's play.
23 gxf4 xf4



24 c3??

A major blunder. So would have been 24 g1 h3+ 25 e2 xe4+ 26 d2 xg1 27 xg1 xf3, but when embarking on her sacrifice Bhatia had to make sure that she had enough for the piece after 24 e3. It seems that Black does with the calm 24...e6, emphasising the point that White is extremely tied down. The rooks and knight lack good squares and the bishop isn't up to much. That leaves queen moves and after 25 f1 (or 25 c5 h3+ 26 f1 xe4 27 d3 f4 28 e7 g8 with three pawns and an ongoing initiative for the piece) 25...ae8 26 d2 c5 27 c3 b5 28 a3 d6 Black's pressure would have continued to compensate for the piece, albeit with everything still to play for.

24...h3+ 25 e3 f4+
Maybe this in-between move had escaped the young Pein's attention.
26 d3 xf3+ 27 d2 f4+ 0-1

With Wood Green not really justifying their position as top seeds, perhaps that final addition to the Pool A, Barbican I, will prove the strongest team. Last year Barbican had one of their worst ever seasons, but this time around it's hard not to see them at least making the championship pool. They opened their account with a 5½-2½ victory over the AD's, with Sam Collins making a very welcome return to their ranks.

S. Collins-A. Merry Barbican I vs the AD's *Sicilian Taimanov*

1 e4 c5 2 f3 c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 xd4 d6 5 c3 e6 6 e2 b4

Taking up the challenge, but one wonders if the Suffolk star later regretted not preferring a transposition to the Scheveningen with 6...d6.

7 0-0!
This pawn sacrifice was recommended by John Emms back in 2006 in a certain *Dangerous Weapons: The Sicilian*, and continues to pack a certain punch.
7...xc3 8 bxc3 xe4 9 d3 f6

Black's main defences are 9...xc3 10 g4 f6 and 9...d5. The text feels a little too submissive.

10 g5
Pinning the knight can't be bad, but I can't explain why Collins rejected the Emms-approved 10 b5!: for example, 10...0-0 (10...d5 11 a3 e7 12 d6+ f8 13 c4 looks rather grim for Black) 11 a3 e7 12 c7! xc7 13 xe7 when Black should probably ditch the exchange for not quite enough rather than allow 13...e8 14 xf6 gxf6 15 h5.

10...a5



11 f4?!
Aggressive, but this may ask too much of White's position. One can't blame Merry for breaking the pin and not fearing 11 xf6 gxf6. After 12 e1 White does, however, retain a degree of annoying compensation, as shown by 12...h5 13 b5 a6 14 d6+ e7

Editor of satirical chess magazine Kingpin, Jon Manley, brought the fight to his higher-rated opponent and won a beautiful miniature.

16 xh7+! xh7 17 h5+ g8 18 f3 h4
The only defence, but White had no doubt seen his next some way in advance.

19 f5 xf5 20 xf5 1-0
Resignation was not a moment too early, since 21 g4+ is threatened and 20...d6 would hang the bishop.

Farewell Wood Green?

London's strongest club have lost not just stars like David Howell, but also stalwarts in the shape of John Emms and Chris Ward. Admittedly they have managed to retain Jon Speelman and Jovanka Houska, but fielded three players rated below 2150 in the opening weekend. As a former regular of their side in the early 1980s commented, it was the first time in 30 years that he could have got in their team.

Last season's runners-up lost the bottom three boards against Warwickshire Select, but prevailed 4½-3½, with Speelman and our Executive Editor winning smoothly as White, and the Quality Chess connection of Andrew Greet and John Shaw also contributing full points. Wood Green then showed plenty of fight on the Sunday and suggested that they may yet avoid the relegation pool. Outraged by almost 100 points a board on average, they fought tooth and nail in a long, very close match with Barbican I.

Husband and wife team Arne Hagesaether and Jovanka Houska did especially well, the former holding a rather grim position against Simon Knott and the latter smoothly outplaying rising star Isaac Sanders. Barbican scored crushing wins, though, thanks to Lorin D'Costa and Kanwal Bhatia, and came home 4½-3½ after John Cox just about managed not to overpress in an endgame against Sarah Hegarty.

15 ♖e4. Once again one also wonders about 11 ♖b5, but Collins was likely put off by 11...♗e4!, and if 12 ♖f4 ♗xc3 13 ♗d6+ ♗f8 14 ♗d2 ♗d5.

11...♗xc3

Merry decides he might as well have a second pawn to compensate for his lack of dark-square control. Likewise, after 11...♗c5 12 ♗h1 ♗xd4 13 cxd4 ♗xd4 14 ♖e1 ♗f8 15 ♗f3 White would have had some enduring compensation, but surely not quite enough for two pawns.

12 ♗b5 ♗c5+ 13 ♗h1 ♗d4

Covering c7 and trying to free his position with an exchange. 13...♗d5 was another try, but after 14 ♖h4! ♗cb4 15 ♖f2 ♗c6 16 c4 ♗xd3 17 ♗xd3 White's initiative would have begun to take on alarming proportions. Perhaps the calm 13...♖b8! was best. After 14 ♗c7+ ♗f8 Black threatens to corral the knight and it's not obvious how White continues.

14 a4!

Stronger than exchanging on d4. Merry is given more to think about and now in the event of 14...a6 15 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 White will always have a timely a4-a5 to clamp the queenside.

14...♗xb5 15 axb5 d6 16 ♗f3



Merry's last few moves appear very natural and can hardly be terrible, but now White is well coordinated and has potential pressure right across the board.

16...♗d7

Essential preparation for castling (16...0-0? 17 ♖xf6 gxf6 18 ♗g3+ ♗h8 19 ♗h4 would not have been the way to go), but one wonders if a product of the Soviet school would have returned the extra material to simplify with 16...d5!? 17 f5 ♗e4 18 ♖xe4 dxe4 19 ♗xe4 0-0.

17 ♖ae1 0-0

In view of what follows, 17...h6!? 18 ♖h4 0-0 came into consideration, but there's sometimes a good reason why pawns in front of the king should not be pushed and after 19 ♗e4 g6 20 ♖f2 ♗c7 White can even blast ahead with 21 f5!?

18 ♗g3

Black has got a pawn to d6, but remains somewhat hamstrung by his lack of a dark-squared bishop.

18...♗c7?

18...♗h8? 19 ♗h4 was no help, of course, but neither will Merry's offer of the exchange save him. Radical measures were called for in the shape of 18...f5!, and if 19 ♖xe6 (19 ♖h6 ♖f7 20 ♖xe6 ♗f8 21 ♖e8 b6 is also solid enough) 19...♗e5 20 ♖e7 ♗g6, plugging some key lines.

19 ♖h6 g6 20 f5!



This is the problem. White can spurn the exchange as his attack becomes near decisive.

20...exf5

An only move. It would have been an immediate knock-out in the event of 20...♗e5? 21 ♖xe5! dxe5 22 fxf6 hxg6 23 ♖xg6!

21 ♖e7

Breaking through to the cherished seventh rank and threatening to take on f5 and then f8. Black is simply doomed from what I can see.

21...♗c5

21...♗c3!? was worth a go, hoping for 22 ♖xf5? ♗e5, but 22 ♗xd6 ♗f6 23 ♖xd7 ♗xd6 24 ♖xd6 would have bagged a piece and the game.

22 ♖xf5 ♗d4 23 ♖xf8 ♗xf8 24 ♖xf7

Two rooks on the seventh is more than the potential future GM can cope with.

24...♖e6

Shedding a piece, but there was nothing better.

25 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 26 ♖xe6 a5

The a-pawn is Black's last hope, but Collins has everything under control.

27 h3! a4 28 ♖xd6 ♗a1+ 29 ♗h2 a3 30 ♖c4+ ♗h8 31 c3 1-0

All of Guildford II, last year's third-placed team, White Rose, and perennial underachievers Blackthorne Russia could also claim to be the strongest side in what should be a very competitive pool. One year Blackthorne will make full use of what is on paper a pretty strong squad, headed up by Danny Gormally and Adam Hunt.

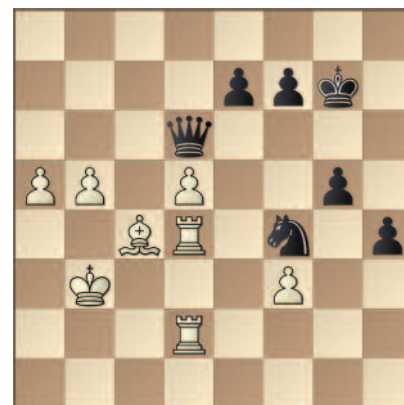
Blackthorne began with what appeared a 50-50 match against Guildford II, but were always up against it after Gormally was caught out by a vicious piece of opening preparation from c3 Sicilian expert Dave Smerdon. Guildford ran out winners 5-3, which in recent seasons would have heralded a second defeat for Blackthorne, but perhaps they have injected some steel over the summer as this time they not only rallied, but annihilated South Wales Dragons 6½-1½.



IM Sam Collins' Barbican team got off to a fine start, winning both their matches in the opening weekend, including a narrow 4½-3½ victory over former favourites Wood Green.

The Dragons had already suffered on their return to the top flight, going down 6-2 on the opening day to White Rose, despite James Cobb finding some impressive tactics to salvage a draw against Peter Wells in a gripping time scramble. The Yorkshire regular qualifiers for the European Club were victorious the next day too, wins for James Adair and Iain Gourlay cancelling out former Guildford supremo Nigel Povah's win on bottom board. The match was very close for a long time, but Guildford II eventually went down 4½-3½ after an under pressure Sophie Milliet overstepped the time limit on move 40 and Yang-Fan Zhou couldn't gain more than a draw from a crazy encounter.

Y.F.Zhou-C.McNab Guildford II vs White Rose



The Scottish Grandmaster had missed a powerful shot in the time scramble (see this month's *Find the Winning Moves*), and at move 40 a rather murky position is apparent. White's pawns do appear the more dangerous though.

41 a6

This feels a little unnatural, allowing Black's queen to blockade, but it is only White's next which we should condemn. The alternative was 41 b6 and after 41...h3 42 b7 ♖g6 43 a6 ♗e5 44 ♖a2 the storm clouds appear to be gathering. However, after 44...♗b6+ 45 ♖c3 ♗xf3 46 ♖d1 h2 47 a7 Black can either check on e3 or go in for the cheeky 47...♗b7!? 48 a8 ♗xa8 49 ♖xa8 ♗g1, and in both cases the game very much carries on.

41...♗c5 42 ♖e4?

Fed up with having his rooks rather tied down, Zhou attempts to free them, but he should have done so with 42 d6 exd6 43 ♖xd6. This creates the threat of 44 ♖d7 and after, for instance, 43...♗g6 (heading for e5) 44 ♖6d5 ♗e3+ 45 ♖2d3 ♗g1 46 ♖d1 ♗e3+ 47 ♖b4 White would have remained the clear favourite to land the spoils.

42...h3 43 ♖e5

43 ♖a2? might appear tempting, but after 43...♗xd5 44 a7 ♗b4+ 45 ♖c2 ♗c3+ 46 ♖b1 ♗b6 it's Black who should win.

43...♖f6 44 ♖e1 ½-½

Perhaps White should have preferred 44 ♖e4!? when 44...♗g2 45 d6 exd6 46 ♖d5 would have introduced a whole new level of complexity, as after the text Black might even have played on with 44...♗g2!.



In the endgame arising after 45 ♖c1 (45 ♖a1? ♗e3 46 ♗e2 is what White would like to do, but he can't cover everything against the formidable queen and knight combo after 46...♗xd5) 45...♗e3 46 ♖h2 ♗xc4 47 ♖xc4 ♗xb5+ 48 ♖c3 only Black would have enjoyed winning chances with such an active queen. Indeed, in practice Zhou might have done well to hold this with such a potentially loose rook on the h-file. McNab though correctly accepted the draw and so guaranteed victory for his side.

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Division 1, Pool A		P	W	D	L	Pts	GP
1	White Rose	2	2	0	0	4	10½
2	Barbican 4NCL I	2	2	0	0	4	10
3	Blackthorne Russia	2	1	0	1	2	9½
4	Guildford II	2	1	0	1	2	8½
5	Wood Green HK	2	1	0	1	2	8
6	The AD's	2	1	0	1	2	7½
7	Warwickshire Select	2	0	0	2	0	6½
8	South Wales Dragons	2	0	0	2	0	3½

Division 1, Pool B		P	W	D	L	Pts	GP
1	Guildford I	2	2	0	0	4	13
2	Cambridge University	2	2	0	0	4	10
3	Cheddleton	2	2	0	0	4	9
4	Grantham Sharks	2	1	0	1	2	8½
5	Oxford	2	1	0	1	2	8½
6	Barbican 4NCL II	2	0	0	2	0	6
7	e2e4.org.uk	2	0	0	2	0	5
8	Hackney	2	0	0	2	0	4

Chess with Monsieur Joffroy

by Duncan Gillies MacLaurin

In memory of Frédérique Joffroy (1962-1980)

**Losing to me wasn't the badge of shame
your father thought it was. He couldn't stop
the stronger player coming out on top.
It came as quite a shock to hear him claim
my proletarian tactics were to blame.
It's standard stuff to snatch a pawn, then swap
off all the pieces; suicide to drop
the basic principle behind the game.
To think that he was meant to be the host!
We were thirteen, your father forty-four.
Five years later I was told, by post,
that you, my friend, had hanged yourself. Your ghost
jolted my memory. Outplayed once more,
your father kicked the table to the floor.**

Duncan Gillies MacLaurin was born in Glasgow in 1962, sent to boarding school in Perthshire, and awarded an exhibition in Classics to Oxford. He left without his degree, and after a short spell at London University, he spent two years busking in the streets of Europe. In 1986 he met his future wife, Danish journalist and writer, Ann Bilde, in Italy and went to live in Denmark. He took degrees in English and Latin at Aarhus University and since 1995 has taught in gymnasiet (sixth-form colleges).

He is both a poet and a singer/songwriter. Three collections of his poetry have been published, and in 2012 he gave seven concerts at one of the Edinburgh Festivals. He was a keen chess player in his youth, and writing this sonnet in 2013 prompted him to take up playing again, both online and over the board.