

4NCL Telford - Weekend 4 (by Steve Burke)

Finally the weather gods seem to be relenting, and I even felt inspired to drop the top down on my car for the first time in months!

In line with the increase in temperature, the chess is also heating up as we head towards the final stretch.

Congratulations to the four more teams that qualified for the Division 3 Promotion Pool on Saturday - and a special mention for Warwickshire Select, who take through a maximum 6 points. Despite having lost narrowly to three of the teams going into the Relegation Pool, they had big wins against the top three. Obviously they enjoy a challenge!

Division 3 South

Saturday was mostly about which final pools the teams would end up in. Though some were already fighting for points in their new pool, and others had nothing to gain or lose.

Pool A

The matches were all very tight in Round 7.

A draw against The Rookies was enough for the Anglian Avengers to reach the Promotion Pool at their opponent's expense. Shropshire also qualified with a draw against Leeds UOB to take the fourth spot.

There was another draw between the two teams already qualified, West is Best and Midland Monarchs, while the only win was a narrow one for Rhyfelwyr Essyllwg over Oxford 2. These last two matches counting for the points in the final pools.

Pool B

Fermented Sharks crushed CSC Rhinos to qualify for the Promotion Pool. Meanwhile Warwickshire Select beat Wessex to also qualify – and turn that whole Pool upside down!

Ashfield-Breadsall won, to top Pool B with 11 points. Wessex finished second with 10. However, as Warwickshire had gained most of their points against the top teams, they went through as Pool leaders on a maximum six points, while Ashfield-Breadsall and Wessex start on 3 points each.

In the other match, Surbiton won a close contest against MK Phoenix that counts for the Relegation Pool.

Pool C

The Promotion Pool got under way with a win for West is Best over Warwickshire, leapfrogging them into top spot on 7 points. The other decisive match saw Ashfield-Breadsall suffer a series of disasters, including my own, to lose heavily against Anglian Avengers, who go third. The other two matches were drawn.

Pool D

All the games were decisive, and Rhyfelwyr Essyllwg, The Rookies and Surbiton went equal top on points with 6. So they will no doubt be breathing a little easier going into the final weekend.

The Surbiton win included the point they got in my Star Game below, which you will see could have gone either way.

The other winners were Leeds UOB who joined CSC Rhinos on 4 points, giving them some leeway over the bottom teams.

Division 4

Generally the teams at the top continued to pick up points and there's not a great change between them.

Iceni 1 had a big win over leaders Sussex Martlets 2 (who bounced back on Sunday to narrowly beat Shropshire and stay top) and a draw with West is Best 2, leaving them in 3rd and 4th places respectively behind The Full Ponty.

The only teams to win both matches were Barnet Knights 1 and Ashfield Breadsall 2. Both doubled their points tally, but along with Shropshire 2, Cambridge University 3 and Throw in the Tal 1 (who are on 9 points) they are probably too far behind the leaders to challenge for promotion. However they may well have a serious impact on that fight when playing the top teams in the final weekend.

Star Game

As mentioned above, this game had a big impact on the Surbiton v Oxford 2 match. It was a real ding-dong battle with both sides being clearly winning at various times.

Singleton,Michael P F (2125) - Idle,Oscar (1840) [E52]

4NCL 3 South pool D Telford, ENG (8.99), 20.03.2016

[Burke,Steven J with Komodo 9.1]

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e3 0-0 5.Nf3 d5 6.Bd3 b6!? By far the most popular here is 6...c5 7.0-0 Nc6 8.a3 Bxc3 9.bxc3 dxc4 10.Bxc4 Qc7 and white retains an opening edge.

7.0-0 Ba6 On deep engine analysis, Komodo goes for this, while Stockfish likes 7...Bb7 and both seem very playable.

8.Ne5 dxc4 Diagram



9.Bb1!? White sacrifices a pawn for some attacking chances, rather than the simple 9.Nxc4 c5 10.Ne5=

9...Bd6 Seeing what happens in a few moves time, black might have been better off removing the useful queen's knight, then hitting the centre with 9...Bxc3 10.bxc3 c5 though the game move is not a bad one.

10.f4 c5 11.Rf3!? White could get his pawn back with 11.Ne4 as black is pretty much forced to play 11...Bb7 (For example, 11...c3? 12.Nxf6+ Qxf6 13.Be4 c2 14.Qxc2 Bxf1 15.Bxh7+ Kh8 16.Be4 Na6 17.Bxa8 Rxa8 18.Kxf1 Bxe5 19.dxe5+/- Now white is a pawn up, though black has some compensation due to the restricted bishop.) 12.Nxf6+ Qxf6 13.Nxc4 Be7

11...h6 Again black could have avoided the white queen's knight getting into the game by giving back the pawn, 11...Bb7! 12.Rh3 h6 13.Nxc4 Be7=/+

12.Rg3 Diagram



12...b5?? Objectively this loses. Black has several playable lines, including an interesting exchange sacrifice 12...cxd4 13.exd4 Nbd7~/= Now if 14.Ne4? Nxe4 15.Bxe4 Nxe5! 16.Bxa8 Nd3 17.Be4 Nxc1 18.Qxc1 Qf6-/+

13.Ne4! Bb7 14.Nxf6+ Qxf6 Diagram



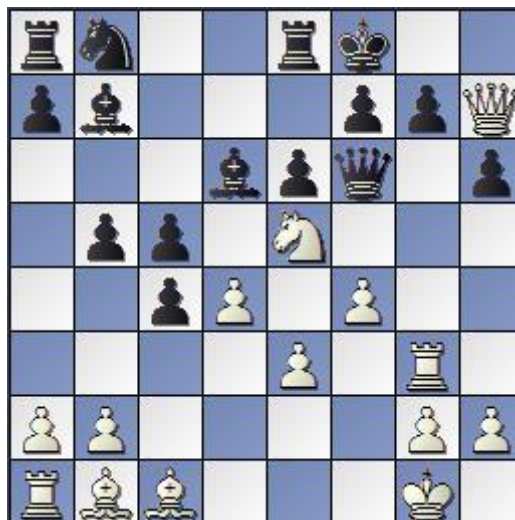
15.Qc2?? This allows black a defence, when white had two winning lines.

15.Ng4! is good, 15...Qh4 16.Rh3 Bf3 17.Qxf3 Qe1+ 18.Qf1 Qxf1+ 19.Kxf1 f5 20.Ne5+-

15.Qh5!! is winning on the spot!

15...Re8?? Between fight and flight, black chooses the wrong option. Black is even for choice after contesting the diagonal with 15...Qf5! 16.Qxf5 (16.Qd1? Be4-/+) 16...exf5 17.Bxf5 Rd8=/+

16.Qh7+ Kf8 Diagram



17.Ng4+- White has many winning possibilities, but the strongest seems to be 17.Bg6!! The main idea is 17...fxg6 (There's no time to run away, 17...Rc8 18.Nxf7 Ke7 19.Bh5 Nd7 (19...Kd7 20.Ne5+)

20.Rxg7+-) 18.Nxg6+ Kf7 19.Ne5+ Kf8 20.Bd2!! intending 20...-- 21.dxc5+- and black is helpless against the coming attack by the whole white army.

17...Qd8 18.Qh8+ Again white has many winning lines, and chooses to win back his pawn immediately. His attack would remain stronger after the quiet move 18.Bd2!! and for example 18...Nd7 19.Ne5 Nxe5 20.Qxg7+ Ke7 21.fxe5 Bc7 22.Bg6 Rf8 23.Rf1+-

18...Ke7 19.Qxg7 Qa5!? Of course white is still winning, but now black creates some distracting threats.

20.Kf2 c3 21.dxc5 Bxc5 22.Qf6+ Kd7 Diagram



23.bxc3?? With a choice of four pawns to take, white chooses the wrong one. [The best was 23.Nxh6! Kc7 24.Nxf7 Nd7 25.Qxc3+- and white is three pawns up.

23...Nc6?+/- Understandably black elects to develop his knight, but his best here was 23...Kc7!! 24.Qxf7+ Nd7 25.Bd2 Rad8~/= Now white is two pawns up, but suddenly black is the one with the better pieces and, komodo suggests, full compensation.

24.Be4 Diagram



24...Be7?? The wrong move order!

24...Rad8! 25.Nxh6 Be7 26.Qg7 (26.Qxf7?? Qxc3 27.Qg7 (27.Rb1?? Ne5+) 27...e5!-/+) 26...Qa4 27.Bf3 Qc2+ 28.Be2 Kc7~/=

24...Rad8! 25.Bd2 Kc8 26.Be1 Qa4 27.Bf3 Ne7 28.Qxf7 Bxf3 29.Qxe6+ Kb7 30.Kxf3 Nd5~/=

25.Bxc6+? The difference to the previous notes is that now black cannot play 25.Qxf7 Qxc3 26.Rb1 Ne5?? as this square is still covered by the knight.

So the game remains complex after 25.Qxf7! Qxc3 26.Rb1+- but white is a pawn up and still has the better play.

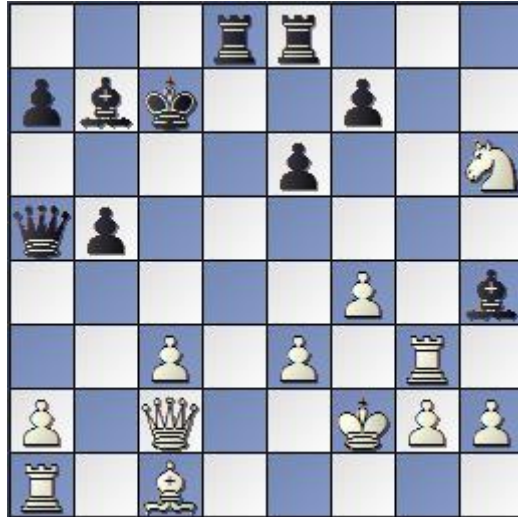
25...Kxc6!? This sets up the win of an exchange, but some might prefer the other option 25...Bxc6 26.Qxf7 Qxc3 27.Ne5+ Kc7 28.Nxc6 Kxc6~/=

26.Qd4?? This hands black the initiative, and in such a sharp position it could be fatal.

26.Qxf7 Qxc3 27.Qxe6+ Kc7 28.Qe5+ Qxe5 29.Nxe5 Bh4 30.Bb2+/=

26...Rad8! 27.Qe4+ Kc7 28.Qc2-/+ White cannot afford to save the exchange here, 28.Qe5+? Bd6 29.Qg7 e5!-/+

28...Bh4 29.Nxh6 Diagram

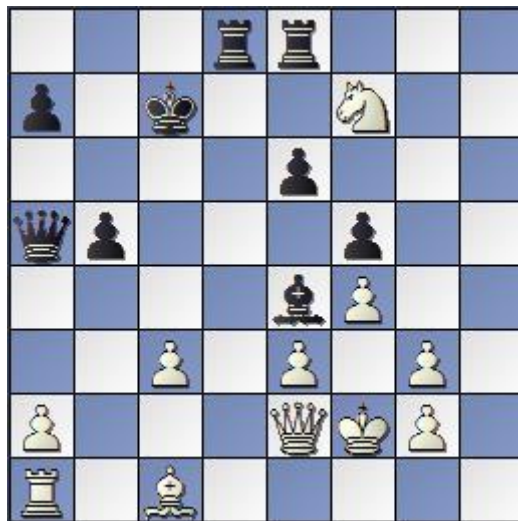


29...Bxg3+ The exchange isn't going anywhere so 29...Re7!-/+ is more accurate. Now 30.e4?? can be met with 30...f5 31.exf5 exf5 32.Nxf5 Be4-+

30.hxg3 f5? Now 30...Re7 31.e4 f5 32.exf5 exf5 33.Nxf5 Be4 can be met with 34.Qe2 Qxc3 35.Nxe7 Qxa1 36.Qxe4 Qxc1 37.Qe5+ Kd7 38.Nd5~/=

However black is still better after 30...Re7 31.e4 and say 31...Kb8 32.Be3 Rc7-/+

31.Nf7! Be4 32.Qe2 Diagram



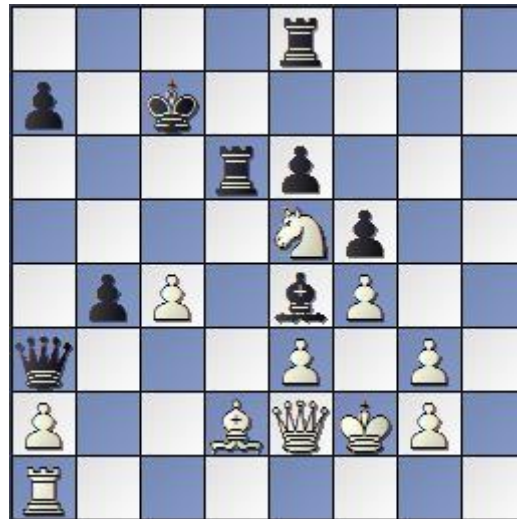
32...Rd3?! Komodo shows the power of the engines in pointing out that this is inaccurate. Better is 32...Rd5 33.a4 Qxc3 34.Bb2 Qb4 35.Ra2 Rf8 36.Be5+ Kd7! 37.Ng5 Bd3!-/+

Also, if white plays as in the game, 32...Rd5 33.Bd2 Qa3 34.Ne5?? now loses to 34...Qb2 35.Rd1 Red8 36.Ke1 Bc2-+

33.Bd2? Compared to the line above, with the rook on d3, white is okay after 33.a4! Qxc3 34.Bb2 Qb4 35.Ra2 Rf8 36.Be5+ Kd7 37.Ng5 as black doesn't have Bd3+

33...Qa3 34.Ne5 Rd6?!=/+ Black can also give back the exchange here **34...Qb2!** **35.Rd1** Red8
36.Nxd3 Bxd3 37.Qe1 a5-/+

35.c4 b4 Diagram



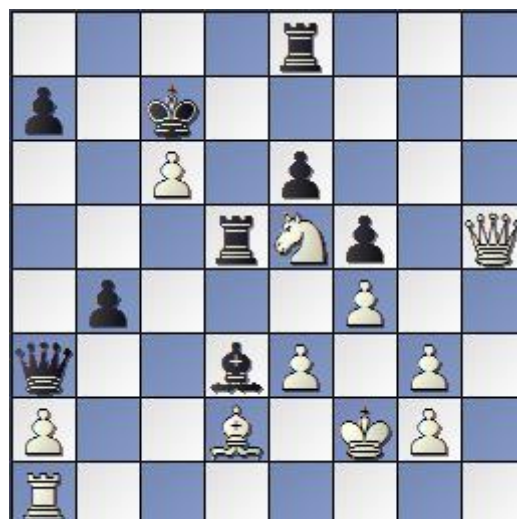
36.c5?! White should probably simplify with **36.Bc1 Qc3 37.Bb2 Qd2 38.Nf3 Qxe2+ 39.Kxe2-/+**

36...Rd5! 37.c6?? Again, simplification was called for, **37.Nc4 Qd3 38.Qxd3 Bxd3 39.Ne5 a5-/+**

37...Bd3??= Chess is hard!

This attacking move blows black's advantage. Black has several winning plans. Possibly simplest is **37...Red8 38.Bc1 (38.Nc4 Qa6 39.Bxb4 Bd3-+)** **38...Qc3 39.Bb2 Qd2 40.Re1 Qxe2+ 41.Rxe2 Rd2 42.Bc1 Rxe2+ 43.Kxe2 Bxg2-+**

38.Qh5! Diagram



38...Re7?? This innocent looking move loses the game!

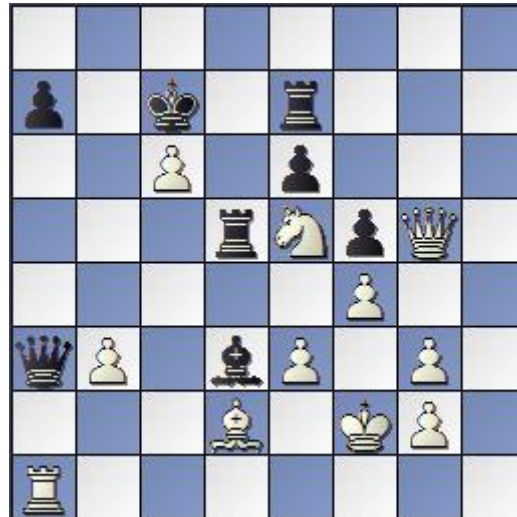
Suddenly it's black who has to find the only defence again - and it's not an easy one! **38...Ba6!! 39.Qf7+!** (The game is on a knife-edge, **39.Qxe8?? Rxd2+ 40.Kg1 Qb2-+**) **39...Kb6 40.Rd1!** You could

spend hours on this position alone. Komodo gives three lines that are all 0.00 and 40...Red8!
41.Nd7+ Kb5!! 42.Qe7 Rh8!-/+

I have to stop somewhere, so it may as well be here. The position remains crazy, but Komodo scores it -0.9

39.Qg5! b3?? Black might have tried 39...Rh7!? when white needs to find 40.Qg8!! Re7 41.Qa8!!+- to win.

40.axb3!! Diagram



40...Qc5+- Black is mated quickly after 40...Qxa1 41.Qxe7+ Kc8 (41...Kb6 42.Qb7+ Kc5 43.Bb4#)
42.Qb7+ Kd8 43.c7+ Ke7 44.c8Q+ Kf6 45.Qf7#

41.b4 Qd6 42.Rxa7+ Kb6 43.Qxe7 Qxe7 44.Rxe7 Ba6 45.Bc3 Rd1 46.Bd4+

An excellent fighting game!!

1-0