

PRESS RELEASE

London Chess Classic, Round 4

FABIANO CARUANA LEADS THE ANISH GIRI CUP

John Saunders reports: The fourth round of the 9th London Chess Classic was played on Tuesday 5 December 2017 at the Olympia Conference Centre, West London. And finally we have a decisive result, at the 20th time of asking. Better late than never. For the first time it's worth showing a crosstable.

CROSTABLE AFTER ROUND 4

POS.	PLAYER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	SCORE
1	GM FABIANO CARUANA 2780 (USA)		.5		.5				.5		1	2.5
T-2	GM MAGNUS CARLSEN 2874 (NOR)	.5				.5		.5			.5	2
T-2	GM HIKARU NAKAMURA 2806 (USA)					.5	.5	.5	.5			2
T-2	GM LEVON ARONIAN 2805 (ARM)	.5						.5	.5		.5	2
T-2	GM M. VACHIER-LAGRAVE 2804 (FRA)		.5	.5			.5			.5		2
T-2	GM WESLEY SO 2784 (USA)			.5		.5			.5	.5		2
T-2	GM VISWANATHAN ANAND 2770 (IND)		.5	.5	.5					.5		2
T-2	GM I. NEPOMNIACHTCHI 2764 (RUS)	.5		.5	.5		.5					2
T-2	GM MICHAEL ADAMS 2727 (ENG)					.5	.5	.5			.5	2
10	GM SERGEY KARJAKIN 2782 (RUS)	0	.5		.5					.5		1.5

GRAND CHESS TOUR 2017



This time we'll take the last game to finish at the top of the report, for no other reason than it was the decisive game: Fabiano Caruana's win with Black against Sergey Karjakin. After 19 straight draws it came as a gift of the gods to a languishing chess world (as was alleged to have been said of the invention of the Evans Gambit).

I'm wondering if a bit of off-board banter might have helped motivate the winner of this game. The previous day Anish Giri had tweeted "LOL @london_chess" – if this was a reference to the notable absence of decisive games in the

Classic, you might adjudge this a case of the pot calling the kettle black. I, of course, could not comment. Anyway, a little while later Fabiano Caruana took it upon himself to reply: *“we’re thinking of renaming it to the Anish Giri Cup”*. I’m not sure Fabiano was the originator of this joke, which had been retailed round Olympia by word of mouth for a while before Fabiano posted it, but I’m not going to reveal the name of the person whom I think did dream it up. Anish came back: *“Leave jokes to me, stay focused there brother. Tomorrow another black. Be solid. Stay true to yourself. Repeat your files. We don’t want any accidents.”* Fabiano’s move: *“True! Wouldn’t want an accident like against Van Foreest.”* That’s a cheeky reference to a game from the recent Dutch Rapidplay Championship in which Anish was (as we say in London) done up like a kipper by 18-year-old GM Jordan van Foreest. Anish: *“Below the belt”*, and the banter continued awhile.



Fabiano Caruana out-prepped Sergey Karjakin in the day’s key game (photo John Saunders)

Maybe the mock advice dished out by Anish did Fabiano some good. It might have encouraged him to do the opposite, because he could hardly have been accused of ‘staying solid’. Joking apart, this game was a triumph for preparation and creative play by Caruana which caught his opponent on the hop.

Karjakin, taken by surprise, seemed indecisive and made a number of sub-optimal moves. Maybe his fleeting opportunity at the end of the previous game was playing on his mind. He hinted at that after the game. But first the game...

London Classic Round 4, 05.12.2017

White: Sergey Karjakin

Black: Fabiano Caruana

Sicilian Taimanov B48

1.e4 c5 The Sicilian is a good way to show his disdain for Giri's mocking advice to 'stay solid'. **2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.Be3 a6 7.Qf3** This became trendy about four years ago as super-GMs sought ways to avoid the main highways of theory. Karjakin has played it before and so has Caruana. **7...Ne5 8.Qg3 b5** 8...h5 immediately, to harass the queen or support a knight on g4, is more popular, when 9.f3 b5 10.0-0-0 d6 11.f4 Ng4 12.e5 dxe5 13.fxe5 Nxe3 14.Qxe3 Bd7 was Karjakin-Giri, Tashkent FIDE Grand Prix 2014, which White won. **9.0-0-0 Nf6 10.f4 Neg4 11.Bg1 h5 12.e5 b4** Black is obliged to counter with this as otherwise his knight would need to retreat to g8. **13.Na4 Nd5** 13...Qa5?! might look tempting but then 14.exf6 Qxa4 15.fxg7 Bxg7 16.h3 Qxa2



17.hxg4 Qa1+ 18.Kd2 Qxb2 19.Ke2 and Black is unlikely to get enough compensation for the sacrificed piece. **14.Nb3** "This doesn't really work out for White," said a well-prepared Caruana after the game. **14...Bb7 15.Nac5 (diagram) 15...Bc6!?** Leaving the known universe and posing White a few questions. Not insoluble ones but it contributed to running Karjakin's clock down, while Caruana had been playing very quickly to here. 15...Rc8 16.Bd3 a5 17.Kb1 Bc6 18.Na6 Qd8 19.Nd4

a4 was played in a blitz game between Nepomniachtchi and Wang Yue in Beijing in 2014 and ended in a draw. **16.Ne4** White has a lot of options. If 16.Nxa6 Qc8 17.Nac5 Rxa2 and it is probably a bit better for Black. 16.Bxa6? d6! 17.exd6 Bxd6 and Black is close to winning with the threats to take on f4 and powerfully-placed bishops. 16.h3 Nh6 and the knight comes to f5; 16.Bd3 allows Black to make progress on the queenside with 16...a5 **16...f5 17.h3?** From here things started to get problematic for White. In fact, he loses a pawn by force. Karjakin admitted he didn't know what to do here, but 17.exf6 gxf6 18.h3 Qxf4+ 19.Qxf4 Nxf4 looks reasonably OK for White and at least is better than the move played. **17...h4 18.Qe1** Not 18.Qf3 Nde3! when ...Nxd1 and ...Bxe4 are the twin threats. **18...fxe4 19.hxg4 Nxf4** The e5-pawn goes too. **20.Rxh4 20.Bd4** Be7 holds the h-pawn and gets ready for Bg5. **20...Rxh4 21.Qxh4 Qxe5 22.Bd4 Ng6! 23.Qh3 23.Bxe5** Nxh4 leaves Black with a healthy extra pawn. **23...Qg5+ 24.Kb1 Bd5 25.Bg1** "A terrible move

but already I didn't think I could have compensation." (Karjakin) **25...Be7 26.g3?**

Weakening the f3 square, which Black is quick to exploit. Karjakin failed to live up to his 'Minister of Defence' nickname, earned against Carlsen, in this game. **26...Ne5 27.Be2**

Nf3 28.Bxf3 Giving up bishop for knight and straightening out Black's doubled pawns doesn't look promising. Maybe parking the bishop away from the knight's influence with 28.Bb6 was better, though Black can continue with 28...a5 since White can hardly take on a5. **28...exf3 29.Bd4 Kf7 30.Nc1 d6** It is just a matter of shuffling his central pawns



forward to support the f3-pawn for Black. White has little by way of an active plan. **31.Nd3 e5**

32.Bf2 Be6 33.Nxb4 e4 34.Qh1 Rc8 35.Nxa6

(diagram) Curiously, White goes a pawn ahead

after this but a more important factor in the position is the dominance of Black's central pawns, not to mention the strong position of his other pieces. **35...Qa5** Though White now has a mini-combination to save the greedy knight, it

involves exchanging queens, thus facilitating Black's task. **36.Qh5+ Qxh5 37.gxh5 Bg5**

38.Re1 After 38.Rxd6 White would be two

pawns up but then 38...e3 and Black's two connected passed pawns each two squares from queening, plus an immediate threat to a piece, adds up to about a queen's worth of value. **38...Bc4 39.Nb4 Re8 40.Re3** A forlorn attempt to blockade the pawns. White was probably just focused on making the time control. **40...Bxe3 41.Bxe3 Re5 42.g4**

Rg5 0-1 Seeing as Black is simply barrelling his way through White's defences, ignoring White's empty threats, it is a good moment to resign.

Karjakin, always graceful in defeat, commented wistfully, "yesterday I could have been clear first. Now I am clear last." Caruana was obviously well booked up and mentioned after the game that he had intended to play it against Nepo the previous day but faced 1.Nf3 instead of 1.e4. It was a great result for the new sole tournament leader, especially since he has had three Blacks in four games so far, and can look forward to a majority of his games with the shiny white lumps from now on.

The first game to finish was Anand-Aronian, just after two hours' play and 31 moves played (that's seven out of twenty games finishing in exactly 31 moves now, incidentally).

The opening was a Ruy Lopez (or Spanish, if you prefer). It wasn't quite the same as the line Aronian played with Black in his first two games, but had more of a Marshall Gambit flavour. It had some interesting moments, with Black obtaining satisfactory positional compensation for a pawn but gradually subsided to the usual result.



Wesley So tried a reversed Benkö Gambit but Mickey Adams defended stoutly (photo John Saunders)

So-Adams was another 31-move draw. It started life as a Réti or rather a reversed Benkö Gambit with an extra tempo. It looked fairly enterprising on Wesley's part but Mickey neutralised his aggression, gave the pawn back and halved out quite comfortably.

Nakamura-Nepo was a Sicilian Najdorf with g3, which followed the course of Carlsen-Nakamura, from Bilbao 2016, which Hikaru won with Black – a happy memory as this was his first win against the champ in a classical game, but as he admitted after this game, Magnus was better in the early part of that game so he thought he would try it for White. He enjoyed a space advantage out of the opening and controlled the c-file for a while but it wasn't enough to overcome the Russian.



The world champion seemed in some danger of losing his game to MVL for a while. Carlsen defended a d3 Giuoco Piano but felt obliged to give up a pawn to free his game. Computer concurred with his idea and

didn't think he stood too badly but he still had to work a little to hold the draw. A draw with Black wasn't a bad result for him as it also kept one of his rivals for the Grand Chess Tour at bay, but, as Yasser Seirawan observed, you could still sense Carlsen's frustration at the draw traffic jam.



Calamity for Luke McShane in his match with David Howell (photo John Saunders)

The second game of the British KO Championship was won by David Howell after an unexpected twist at the end of a long game when Luke McShane, with the exchange for two pawns in a tricky endgame which he might well have held with best play, walked into a gruesome knight fork which cost him a whole rook. That means that, under the classical game scoring system being used (2-1-0), Howell now leads the classical component of the match by 3-1 with two more classical games to go before they play four rapid games scored in the usual 1-½-0 manner.

The leaders of the London FIDE Open are now Hrant Melkumyan (Armenia) and Jahongir Vakhidov (Uzbekistan) with 5/5 and they will meet in round six. Melkumyan ended the remarkable winning streak of 13-year-old Nihal Sarin, while Vakhidov defeated home favourite and reigning British champion Gawain Jones. In joint third place currently are former British Champion Jonathan Hawkins (England), Matthieu Cornette (France) and Alexander Donchenko (Germany) on 4½.



Hrant Melkumyan ended Nihal Sarin's run of wins in round five of the Open (photo John Saunders)

Round five of the London Classic takes place on Wednesday 6 December at 16.00 UK time.

ENDS

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