

Tradewise Gibraltar Chess Festival 2016

Monday 25 January - Thursday 4 February 2016

Round 2 Report 27 January 2016 - by John Saunders (@JohnChess)

Round 2: Indian Takeaway

With many pairings still involving a wide disparity in ratings, most of the round two games of the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters resulted in favour of the higher ranked players, but there were still a number of surprises. The top two ranked players, Hikaru Nakamura of USA and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France both won comfortably and are among the 42 players (out of 254) who are on the maximum score. Hikaru's opponent, Hungarian GM Tamas Fodor jnr had the white side of a Nimzo-Indian but played a surprisingly dubious line, allowing the American to box in his kingside pieces and cruise to an easy win. Valentina Gunina defended stoutly against Maxime Vachier-Lagrave but MVL unleashed a powerful combination to finish the game. When he plays like this, MVL seems to be channelling Mikhail Tal.

Tradewise Gibraltar Masters 2016, Round 2
M.Vachier-Lagrave (2785) - V.Gunina



White has the two bishops but one of them is on its original square and being dominated by the black knight. White now embarks on an ambitious plan, giving up a pawn to open up the position for his bishops. **23.f5!? Rxe5 24.Bf4 Rxe1+ 25.Rxe1 Qa5 26.Qg3!?** White is going all-out for the attack and gives up a second pawn. Instead Stockfish gives an advantage to White after 26.Re7 Qxc3 27.Qxc5, etc. **26...Qxa2 27.Bg5 Rc8 28.f6 gxf6 29.Bxf6** Now Black has to work overtime to avoid mate on the weak dark squares around the king. **29...Qd2 30.g5**



30...Nd6? A clever idea to try and carry the fight back but unfortunately for Black there is a hidden tactical flaw, albeit one which only super-GMs might be expected to see. Instead 30...Re8 31.Rxe8+ Bxe8 32.Qc7 Qe3+ 33.Kh2 Bf7 34.Bxd5 Qe2+ 35.Bg2 a5 defends, though there are a lot of tactics to be figured out. **31.g6!** White gives up a third pawn to open up more dark squares around the king. **31...Bxg6 32.Qe5! Rf8** Now Black is overloaded. If 32...Be4, White has 33.Qe6+, with mate or win of a rook with check. If 32...Bf7 33.Re2! and the queen cannot carry out all its necessary defensive tasks, e.g. 33...Qd3 34.Bf1! threatening the loose knight and also Rg2+ followed by Bxd3. **33.Bxd5+ Nf7 34.Bg5** After the queen moves, 35.Bh6 followed by mate on g7. **1-0**

Eight of the top female competitors are among the 42 leaders. Natalia Pogonina of Russia, runner-up in the last women's world championship, brought off one of the best results of the day, beating super-GM Arkady Naiditsch of Azerbaijan. Former women's world champion Alexandra Kosteniuk of Russia beat top British woman player Jovanka Houska.

The top three Indian players have now all dropped half points, so are half a point behind the leading group. Vishy Anand and Surya Shekhar Ganguly were both held to draws in the first round but swapped opponents for the second round. Lightning did not strike twice for the players who had done so well to draw with them previously. Vishy Anand won quickly and efficiently against Matthias Bach, while Surya Shekhar Ganguly won an even quicker game against Szidonia Vajda, who may have been suffering the psychological after-effects of her sensational round one game with Anand as she lost a piece as a result of a simple miscalculation.

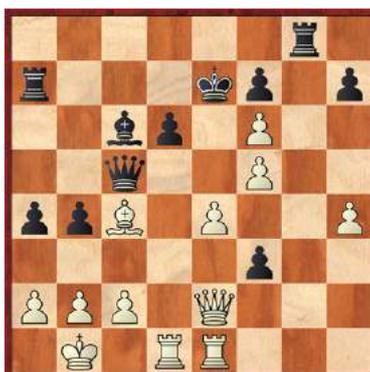
Indian number two Pentala Harikrishna was held to a draw by Natalia Zhukova of Ukraine, who always plays well in Gibraltar. India is still well represented amongst the leaders, with nine players on 2/2, including leading Indian female player Harika Dronavalli and Mhamal Anurag, who is only ranked 74th in India. He is the lowest rated player on a 100% score at present.

The unofficial award of giant-killer of the round probably goes to Swedish GM Erik Blomqvist for his win against 2751-rated Liao Chao of China. After a long slab of Sicilian theory, the position suddenly sharpened up and the Chinese player unwisely advanced his king to capture a pawn when heavy pieces were still on the board. Blomqvist latched onto the winning idea like a heat-seeking missile locking on to its target, and the Chinese player was history.

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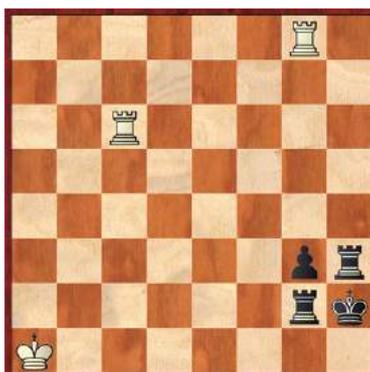
E. Blomqvist (2492) - Li Chao (2751)

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bg5 e6 7.Qd2 a6 8.0-0 Bd7 9.f4 b5 10.Bxf6 gxf6 11.Kb1 b4 12.Nce2 Qb6 13.Nxc6 In previous games, Hou Yifan had played 13.g3 and 13.Qe1 against Li Chao but White varies. **13...Bxc6 14.f5 e5 15.Ng3 Qc5** 15...h5 has been played more frequently but White has scored heavily against it. **16.Nh5 Ke7 17.Bd3 Rg8 18.Rhe1** Quite a number of games have gone 18.Rhg1 Rg5 19.g4, etc, with no clear advantage either way. **18...a5** We're the players are on their own. **19.Qe2 a4 20.Bc4 Ra7 21.h4 Bh6 22.g4 Bf4 23.Nxf4** Stockfish considers the mysterious 23.Ka1!? to be the best move here but it is far from clear why. **23...exf4 24.g5 f3** After 24...fxg5 25.hxg5 Rxg5, the remarkable 26.Qh2!? promises an advantage for White. The bishop can't be taken: 26...Qxc4? 27.Qxf4 threatening mate in two by Qxd6+, and the loose rook. **25.gxf6+**



25...Kxf6? Black should retreat with his king, e.g. 25...Ke8 26.Qe3 **26.Qxf3! Qxc4** White has a clear win after Black takes the bishop, but not taking it is not much better: 26...Ke7 27.Qf4 Qe5 28.f6+ Ke8 29.Qf5 and White is a pawn up and likely to win more material. **27.Qf4!** Quiet but deadly. 28.e5+ winning the queen and 28.Rxd6+ cannot both be prevented. **27...Qc5 28.Rxd6+ Ke7 29.f6+ Ke8 30.Rxc6! Qxc6 31.Qb8+ Kd7 32.Rd1+ Ke6 33.Qxa7** Black is two pawns adrift and his king cannot hide. The despatch is not the quickest but the result is never in doubt. **33...Kxf6 34.Rf1+ Ke5 35.Qxf7 Rg2 36.Qe7+ Kd4 37.Qxb4+ Ke5 38.Qe7+ Kd4 39.Qa7+ Ke5 40.Qa5+ Kd4 41.Qd8+ Kxe4 42.Qe7+ Kd5 43.c4+ 1-0**

I'll leave you with the final position of Nigel Short's game against Luca Shytaj, the husband of our commentator Elisabeth Paehtz.



Shytaj (White, to play) resigned since he can't stop Nigel playing something like Rf2, g2, Rf1+ and queens. But the piquant thing is the tight-knit cluster of black pieces compared to White's open spaces. As I quipped to Nigel, had this been a go position, Black with minimal territory occupied to compare with White's abundant acres, would probably have to resign. But I was momentarily forgetting that this is a chess tournament.

More fun tomorrow.

John Saunders

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