

6TH LONDON CHESS CLASSIC (6-14 DECEMBER 2014)

CLASSIC ROUND 1: 10 DECEMBER 2014

RULE BRITANNIA

The host nation flew the flag on the first day of the Classic proper, with the only wins being achieved by three people from England: Mickey Adams, who won a real 'up and downer' of a game with world number two Fabiano Caruana; Gawain Jones, who won the first game of his six-game match against Romain Edouard; and Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, who won the hearts and minds of his audience at the opening ceremony.



It was a great boost for the prestige of the event, and for British chess in general, to have someone with the national profile of Boris Johnson pay us a visit. For those overseas readers who've never heard of him, he is a very famous politician here in Britain, and not just in London, with an approval rating in opinion polls which is the envy of all other British party leaders. He is often spoken of in the press as a future prime minister. Part of his charm is his ability to deliver an impromptu speech, full of imaginative allusions and classical references, not to mention occasional gaffes which don't seem to bother him at all and from which he recovers effortlessly. Boris treated us to just

such an oration at Olympia, admitting to a lack of proficiency at the game, but describing the chessboard and its one 'castle' per four pieces in terms of a housing crisis. His imagery delivered at machine-gun rate might have been a bit hard to follow, but the whole thing was delivered with such ebullience that it couldn't fail to amuse and energise. Thankfully Boris didn't claim that chess was invented in Britain (as he did with table tennis in China at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, when he memorably reminded the world of its original wacky British name 'wiff waff'). Maybe he has now rechristened a rook as a 'castle' (and he must have said so a dozen times in his speech), and given his Olympian authority in the city that hosts our tournament, I guess we are all going to have to fall into line with him for the duration.

I scanned the faces of our elite players and they were clearly entertained by London's famous mayor. Afterwards I asked Hikaru what he thought of him. "He's certainly interesting. He can talk about anything," was Hikaru's bemused reply. I've news for Hikaru and any other US citizens reading this who may be unaware – Boris Johnson was born in New York City, so I guess that also makes Boris a long shot for future US president.

After Boris played a quick exhibition game with Dave Chan of Barclaycard, with two CSC children assisting them, we moved on to the real action. Hikaru Nakamura versus Anish Giri was the first game to finish, drawn after 33 moves.



Round 1

H.Nakamura (2775) - A.Giri (2768)

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nf6 The Berlin Wall. "For people who like that sort of thing... that is the sort of thing that they like." **4.0-0 Nxe4 5.Re1 Nd6 6.Nxe5 Be7** CSC teachers might like to test their pupils on what happens if Black plays 6...Nxb5 - I won't spoil it for you. **7.Bf1 Nxe5 8.Rxe5 0-0 9.Nc3 Ne8 10.Nd5 Bd6** There's that Anish Giri bishop parked in front of the d-pawn again, just like in his sixth round win in the Super Rapidplay the other day. But this time with Black - and it's the only sensible move, too, in order to preserve the bishop. **11.Re2 Nf6** After the game Anish called this a new move but actually there is a precedent in a recent high-level blitz game (if that counts).



11...c6 12.Ne3 Be7 13.Qe1 Bf6 14.Nf5 d5 15.Ne7+ Kh8 16.Nxc8 Rxc8 was played in Nakamura-Aronian, Sinquefeld Cup 2014 and eventually ended in a draw. **12.Ne3 Re8 13.b3** This does seem to be new. 13.d4 Bf8 14.Nc4 d5 15.Ne5 Ne4 16.f3 Nd6 17.Bf4 Be6 18.Qd2 c6 19.b3 Qb6 20.Bg3 Nf5 was Motylev-Fedoseev, Moscow Blitz Championship 2014. Black soon got pressure against the d4-pawn on the dark squares in general, and won. Hikaru has a new plan in mind. **13...Bf8 14.Bb2 Re6 15.c4 c6 16.Re1 d5 17.cxd5 Nxd5 18.Bc4 Nxe3 19.fxex3** At least the pawn structure is imbalanced now, but it is difficult to see how the position can become dynamic. **19...Rh6 20.Rf1 Be6 21.Bxe6 Rxe6 22.Qf3 Qe8 23.Rf2 Rd8 24.Raf1 Rd7 25.Qf5 Red6 26.Qc2 Rh6 27.g3 c5 28.Rf5 b6 29.R1f2 Re6 30.Qc3 Red6 31.Qc2 Re6 32.Qc3 Red6 33.Qc2 Re6 1/2-1/2** See diagram. Not much to get excited about there.

Next to finish was the battle between the two former world champions, Vladimir Kramnik and Vishy Anand. This started life as a Semi-Slav, Botvinnik System, which to the uninitiated looks like the hairiest sort of opening variation imaginable. But it has been analysed, almost to destruction, over several decades, and now grandmasters are prone to playing through whopping slabs of theory from memory. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw it demo'ed using the Hiarcs Chess Explorer software in the VIP Room. Hiarcs Chess Explorer is a great piece of software and you can get a comprehensive opening book to go with it containing gazillions of games. Some of the lines being examined by Julian Hodgson went beyond move 40 and yet the Hiarcs software was still showing precedents from other games. Imagine that: having to go beyond move 40 to get 'out of the book'. It's not too much of an exaggeration to say that you could go straight from 'the book' to a six-piece endgame tablebase in one or two of these lines.



Nigel Short was scathing about this sort of opening play, in the commentary room, particularly when Dan King said something about this sort of variation being primarily for correspondence players (apologies if I've misquoted you, Dan). "Correspondence players," opined Nigel, "should be executed." Which, later in the VIP room, led into a thoroughly unwholesome debate (in which I confess I took part, a tad too enthusiastically) as to the most suitable form of execution for those who use the medium of the Royal Mail (or their own country's postal service) to play chess. Rising to Nigel's challenge, I thought something slow was most appropriate,

while another GM, not normally known for sadism, thought they ought to be immured. But the latter seems somehow more appropriate for people who play the Berlin Wall, OTB as well as via the post.

Incidentally, before anyone emails me, I don't really subscribe to any of the above. I have my excuse ready (one which I seem to remember deploying before, back in the mists of time): bigger boys made me do it. Anyway, here's the game.

Round 1

V.Kramnik (2769) - V.Anand

1.c4 e6 2.Nc3 d5 3.d4 c6 4.Nf3 Nf6 5.Bg5 dxc4 6.e4 b5 7.e5 h6 8.Bh4 g5 9.Nxg5 White gives up a piece for pawns but the material situation soon events up. 9.exf6 gxh4 10.Ne5 Qxf6 is another very different line but it gets played quite a lot. **9...hxg5 10.Bxg5 Nbd7 11.g3 Bb7 12.Bg2 Qb6 13.exf6 0-0-0 14.0-0 c5 15.d5 b4 16.Na4** 16.Rb1!? has been known about since the 1980s and it is quite potent too: 16...Qa6 (16...bxc3?? 17.bxc3 Qa6 18.Rxb7! Qxb7 19.dxe6 Qb6 20.e7 is a disaster for Black.) 17.dxe6 Bxg2 18.e7 Bxf1 19.Kxf1 is hard to evaluate but could be better for White. **16...Qb5 17.a3 Nb8 18.axb4 cxb4 19.Qg4** Kasparov played 19.Be3 here in a couple of theoretically important games in the Soviet Championship in Frunze in 1981, and it so happened

that he popped into the VIP room around this time after his book-signing session and allegedly made some sage comments about the games. Sadly, I wasn't in the room at the time, so cannot enlighten you further. Maybe his books will offer further guidance. **19...Bxd5 20.Rfc1 Nc6** Black can't do anything about the threat to c4 so he has to cover his king somehow. **21.Bxd5 Rxd5 22.Rxc4 22.Qxc4?? Rd1+!** would be a brutal end to the game. **22...Rxc4** There are still in excess of 80 games on the Mega Database which reach this position - and the vast majority of those played between players rated 2300 and upwards end in a draw. Hence the grumbling about overanalysed lines, etc, from the spectating GMs. **23.Qd4 Kb8 24.Rxc6 Rxc6 25.fxc3 Qxc6 26.Rd1 Qc7 27.b3 Kc8 28.Qe4 Kb8 29.Qd4 Kc8** This little repetition fools the database search but the resultant position around move



40-41 has occurred previously in correspondence games. I'd better not name any of the culprits as they could have a bounty on their heads if Nigel ever becomes FIDE president. **30.Qd3 Bc5+ 31.Nxc5 Qxc5+ 32.Kf1 Qc3 33.Qxc3+ 33.Qe4!?** is playable since **33...Qxf6+?! 34.Kg1** leaves the black king slightly vulnerable with the black queen momentarily offside, although it is probably salvageable. **33...bxc3 34.h4 (diagram)**

There we are - straight out of the book into a level (if slightly imbalanced) rook and pawns endgame. Of course, you or I wouldn't have the slightest difficulty in perpetrating a decisive result (more specifically, a loss) from either side of this position but players of this calibre aren't going to fluff it. **34...e5 35.Ke2 c2 36.Rc1 Kd7 37.Rxc2 Ke6 38.Rc6+ Kf5 39.Kf3 e4+ 40.Ke3 Rb8 41.Rc5+ Kxf6 42.Kxe4 Rxb3 43.Ra5 Rxc3 44.Kf4 Rg1 45.Rxa7 Kg7 1/2-1/2**

So to the one really entertaining game of the round. There were a few mistakes but without them the game of chess would be a dull affair.



Round 1

M.Adams (2745) - F.Caruaana (2829)

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 0-0 8.d3 d6 9.c3 Na5 10.Bc2 c5 11.Nbd2 Nc6 12.Nf1 h6 13.Ne3 Not the commonest: 13.h3 and 13.Ng3 are seen more often. **13...Re8 14.a4 Be6** Black thought for around 20 minutes on this, so was seemingly out of prep. **15.h3 Bf8 16.Nh2** By now White too was thinking for prodigious amounts of time on his moves. **16...b4** Uncharted territory. **16...d5 17.axb5 axb5 18.Rxa8 Qxa8 19.exd5 Nxd5 20.Neg4 Nf4 21.Nf3** was Spraggett-Sargissian, Linares Open 2013, and eventually drawn. **17.Bb3 Rb8 18.Bc4 bxc3 19.bxc3 d5!?** It has been a fairly sedate Ruy Lopez to here but now the gauntlet is thrown down. **20.Bxa6** Adams takes up the challenge. Instead he could have gone in for multiple exchanges in the centre, and probably equality. **20...Qa5 21.c4 21.Bb5 Rxb5! 22.axb5 Qxa1 23.bxc6 Qxc3** should lead to a reasonable advantage for Black. **21...Qxa6 22.exd5 Bxd5 23.cxd5 Nb4!**



The GMs in the VIP room thought Adams might have missed the power of this. The threat to d3 is hard to meet. **24.Ra3** 24.Nhg4 Nxb4 25.Qxg4 Nxd3 26.Rf1 Rb4 27.Qe2 c4 looks quite good for Black. **24...Nfxd5 25.Neg4 f6 26.Nf1 Rbd8** Houdini suggests this was the wrong rook. So does natural logic: it seems better to keep the b8 rook firing down the b-file whilst moving the e8 rook which is relatively underemployed on e8. Perhaps Fabiano was wary of depleting his kingside defences altogether. 26...Red8 is close to winning according to Houdini. **27.Ng3** (diagram)



27...c4? Black is in too much of a hurry. He should preface his attack on the d3-pawn with a precautionary 27...Kh8. Or should I have written that Black was not in enough of a hurry? By now he was down to not much more than 3½ minutes on his clock (plus increments) until move 40. White had around 11 minutes left. **28.Nxh6+!** The cavalry are coming. Julian Hodgson's fertile attacking imagination had latched onto this piece for two pawns sacrifice within seconds of seeing Caruana's unwary 27...c4. In truth it is White's only hope: an attack on the king is the only answer to Black's attack down the centre. The wholly partisan group of VIP room GMs was recovering its confidence. **28...gxh6 29.Qg4+ Kh8 30.dxc4 Ne7** The VIP room gang had been chewing over an infinity of lines emanating from 30...Nf4 31.Bxf4 exf4 32.Rxe8 Rxe8 and were now undecided whether to take on f4 or move the knight nearer the black king. After seeming to be under the cosh, the feeling was that White was not out of gaol. **31.Qh5!** Now another negative aspect of the wrong rook move is revealed: the d8 rook is now tied to the defence of its partner on e8. **31...Ng8** "All his pieces on the back rank!" squealed Julian Hodgson, who tends to go falsetto when he gets excited. And it didn't take him long to see White's next move. **32.Nf5!** Hereabouts the GM pack was squabbling about the rights and wrongs of getting which rook to g3 or e4 in a mad rush to relocate heavy pieces next to Black's king. **32...Qb7 33.Rg3 Qh7** (diagram)



Things were suddenly getting desperate for Black, who was now down to barely a minute plus increments. **34.Nh4?** Cries of English grandmasterly disappointment greeted this unnecessary retreat. 34.Re4! is immensely strong. Well, it is if you've got Hiarcs Chess Explorer suggesting the move, as it was on the big screen in the VIP room. The consensus seemed to be that White, now down to not much more time left than his opponent, was seeing back rank ghosts and thus reluctant to lift a second rook. **34...Ne7 35.Ba3** Adams must have envisaged this as a perfect zugzwang, which it very nearly is. But unfortunately "nearly a zugzwang" is synonymous with "not zugzwang at all". **35...Nbc6!** Anything else loses, e.g. 35...Rb8? 36.Bxb4 and a recapture leaves the e8 rook en prise. **36.Kh2!** Adams must have regained his poise as this is very good, setting Black further organisational problems in his time trouble. However, it's far from being an overwhelming win as it might have been a couple of moves ago. **36...Bg7 37.Bxe7?** Having played A (Kh2!), White fails to play B, which is 37.Rd1! with the intermezzo Qxe8+ lined up now that ...Rxd1 is no longer check on the back rank. That would give Black further problems to solve but only if White

had seen the follow-up to 37...Qg8 which is the devilish 38.Bc1!! since 38...Rxd1 39.Bxh6! mates. **37...Nxe7 38.Rd1 Qg8** Without the dark-squared bishop to join in the attack, there is no attack. **39.Rb1 Rb8 39...Qxc4?** loses to 40.Rb7 and White's attack suddenly comes back with a vengeance. **40.Rd1 Red8 41.c5 Rxd1 42.Qxd1** Time trouble is over. Black still has his extra piece but he's tied to the defence of his kingside. The assessment is around equal. However, Black now gets himself into trouble again. **42...Rb4?** This gives White's queen access to a key square. 42...Qc8 prevents this. **43.Qd7!** A great square for the white queen, helping to support the advance of the queenside pawns, amongst other things. **43...Rxb4 44.Qxe7** White has a cute threat here: to take twice on g7 and then play 48.g4!!, immuring the h4 rook and allowing the queenside pawns to promote without hindrance. **44...Rd4 44...Rxa4? 45.Rxg7! Qxg7 46.Qe8+ Kh7 47.Qxa4** leaves White with a won endgame and a smug feeling of having played a brilliant move when he found his king a really safe square on h2. **45.c6** Houdini thinks 45.a5! is game over and who am I to argue: 45...Qf8 46.Qc7 when something like 46...Ra4 loses to 47.Rb3! and suddenly the white rook is coming at Black from the other side of the board. **45...Qf8 46.Qb7 Rb4 47.Qd7 Rd4 48.Qb7 Rb4 49.Rc3!** White changes tack but he can no longer stop Black getting some air for his awful bishop. **49...f5 49...Rxb7? 50.cxb7 Kh7 51.Rc8 Qb4 52.b8Q Qxa4 53.Qb1+ is hopeless. 50.Qd7 Rd4 51.Qe6 Rd6** (diagram)



Black has defended the best he can but White has a tactical path through to a winning queen and pawns endgame. **52.Qxd6! Qxd6 53.c7 e4+ 54.g3 Bxc3 55.c8Q+ Kh7 56.Qxc3 f4** The best try. **57.gxf4! Qxf4+ 58.Qg3 Qd2 59.Qc7+ Kg6 60.Qb6+ Kh7?! 60...Kg7! 61.Qc7+ Kf6 62.Qc5 Kg6 63.Kg2** makes the win more problematic. **61.Qb7+ Kh8 62.Qa8+! Kg7 63.Qxe4 Kf6** The point of Black's last pair of subtle queen moves is seen after 63...Qxf2+ when 64.Qg2+ answers a check with a check and secures a winning king and pawn endgame. **64.Qf3+ Kg6 65.Kg2 Qa2 66.Qe4+ Kf6 67.Qf4+ Kg6 68.Qd6+ Kg7 69.Qe5+ Kh7 70.a5 Qg8+ 71.Kh2 Qf7 72.Qe4+ Kg7 73.a6 1-0**

The other British success was scored by Gawain Jones. A couple of times Romain Edouard was tempted by warm pawns and Gawain managed to get the sort of attacking game he excels at.

Challenge Match Game 1

G.Jones (2661) - R.Edouard

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.g3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Bg2 Nb6 6.e3 Nc6 7.Nge2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.f4 f6 10.f5 a5 11.b3 Bd7 12.d4 Qc8 13.g4 White is gearing up for a kingside offensive. Around here the remark was heard that Gawain Jones is a follower of the English School of Chess. Made by GMs who were arguably founder members of same, I might add. "English - yes. Chess - yes. But what's this word 'school'?" quipped Nigel Short. **13...Rd8 14.Qe1 Be8 15.Ne4 Nd5 15...exd4 16.exd4 Nxd4 17.Nxd4 Rxd4 18.Bb2** offers compensation for the sacrificed pawn. **16.Qg3 exd4 17.exd4 Qd7** The alumni of the English Chess School were now debating 'g5 or not g5, that is the question'. At the moment the answer is probably no. **18.Bb2 Kh8 19.a3 Bf7 20.Rad1 Bd6 21.Qh4 Qe7 22.Rd3**



(diagram)

The attack-minded alumni were starting to salivate at the prospect of some kingside violence. **22...Bxa3?!** "Whoah! He took it!" went up the cry. The English School of Chess had by now transformed into something resembling a wolf pack. **23.Bxa3 Qxa3 24.g5** Now he plays it. **24.Rh3** is also promising. **24...Qe7 25.Nf4** Surprisingly, perhaps, White holds back from **25.Rh3 Bg8 26.gxf6 gxf6** but **27.N4c3!** takes a bit of finding. Then **27...Nxc3 28.Nf4! Ne2+ 29.Nxe2 Qf7! 30.Nf4 Ne7** and it's still not over. **25...Nxf4 26.Rxf4 Nxd4?** Black takes the bait again. **26...Bg8** could be a defence: **27.gxf6 gxf6** and, for instance, **28.Nxf6 Rd6** is tenable. **27.gxf6 gxf6 28.Nxf6! Ne2+ 29.Kf1 29.Kf2!** would eliminate the defence in the next note as **29...Bg8** is answered by **30.Re3! 29...Bc4?** It will probably make your head hurt working out the permutations, but **29...Bg8!** again seems to hold: the hard move to evaluate, after **30.Re4**, is probably **30...Qc5!** which gives Black the vital intermezzo ...Qg1+ in some key lines. **30.Rxd8+ Rxd8 31.Rxc4 Rd1+ 32.Kf2 Rd2 33.Qxh7+** Nobody likes allowing their

opponent a discovered check on the board but **33.Be4!** is a crafty computer move which Houdini says is winning outright. **33...Qxh7 34.Nxh7 Nf4+** **34...Nd4+** **35.Ke3 Rxc2 36.Kxd4 Kxh7 37.Rxc7+ Kg8** looks as though it might be holdable. **35.Ke3 35.Kf3!? Nxg2 36.Rxc7 Nh4+** **37.Ke4 Re2+** **38.Kd3 Rxh2 39.f6!** is advocated by Houdini but is not straightforward. **35...Rxc2 36.Nf6 Kg7 37.Ne8+ Kf7 38.Nxc7 Nh5 39.Nd5 b5 40.Rc7+ Kf8 41.Rc5 b4 41...a4 42.b4 Rxh2 43.Rxb5 a3 44.Ra5 Rh4** looks tenable. **42.Rxa5 Rxh2 43.Ra8+ Kg7 44.Ra7+ Kh6 45.Kd4 Kg5 46.Rf7**



(diagram)

Hereafter a few direct wins are missed but it probably didn't affect the outcome as the endgame looks won for White. **46...Rc2?!** This wastes time. **46...Rf2 47.f6 Kf5 48.Rf8 Rf3 49.Kc4 Ke6** is definitely better though Black still has an uphill struggle ahead of him. **47.Rf8 Rc1?!** **47...Rf2** again. **48.f6 Rf1 49.Kc5 Rf5 49...Nf4!?** puts up a better fight: **50.Rg8+ Kh4** is surprisingly tenacious. **50.Kc4! Nf4 51.Rg8+ 51.Ne7!** is a more forcing win, the main point being that **51...Rxf6 52.Rxf6 Kxf6 53.Nd5+!** forces a won king and pawn endgame. **51...Kh6 51...Kh4!** avoids the tactic mentioned in the next note but in all likelihood White would play **52.Rd8** and win much as in the game. **52.Nxf4 52.Ne3!** forces the rook away from the f-file and allows the f-pawn to advance, since **52...Rxf6** loses immediately to **53.Ng4+**, etc. But White has already focused on a book rook and pawn win anyway. **52...Rxf4+ 53.Kc5 Kh7 53...Rxf6 54.Kxb4** is a book win for White as the black king is too far away and cut off. **54.Rg7+ Kh6 55.Rb7 Kg6 55...Rxf6 56.Rb6** again wins easily. **56.f7 Kg5 57.Rxb4 Rxf7**

58.Re4 Kf5 59.Re8 1-0

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