



Tradewise Gibraltar Chess Festival 2015

Monday 26 January - Thursday 5 February 2015

Round 1 Report: 27 January *by John Saunders*

The first round of the 13th Tradewise Gibraltar Masters, played at the Caleta Hotel on 27 January, featured a glittering array of grandmasters and professional players pitted against amateur entrants from all over the world. As is usual on these occasions, the professionals triumphed by a huge margin but, as in football's FA Cup, there was much excitement along the way, including one remarkable David versus Goliath achievement for an amateur player.

This year's tournament is very special. It features a member of the ultra-exclusive '2800 Club'. The top seed is former FIDE world champion Veselin Topalov from Bulgaria, making his return to individual open tournament chess after two decades of playing only against fellow elite players in closed tournaments and big matches. Before the game he struck a positive note in interviews, saying how much he was looking forward to the challenge and suggesting he found the constant round of elite-only tournaments with the same handful of players to be a bit boring. In many ways Topalov is the Tal of the 21st century: if you had to pick out a player of the post-Kasparov era who always plays an aggressive game and fights for the point in every game – and, most importantly, does so with a consistently high degree of success – the genial Bulgarian would be a good choice. You only have to look at his games to realise that he is a man who relishes a challenge. Veselin arrived here with his manager Silvio Danailov, and we should remember that it was Topalov's regular match second and assistant, Ivan Cheparinov, who did so well to win here last year. Ivan is also here to defend his Tradewise Gibraltar Masters title. It wasn't all talk, either: Veselin likes his pieces to do most of the talking and followed up with pre-tournament comments with a smooth victory against the Spanish FM Emilio Miguel Sánchez Jérez.

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V.Topalov (2800) - E.Sanchez Jerez (2282)

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 Bg7 4.Bg2 0-0 5.Nc3 d6 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.0-0 a6 8.d5 Na5 9.Nd2 c5 10.Qc2 Rb8 11.a4 A very normal line but Topalov hasn't been down this road in database memory. Most White players opt for 11.b3 here. **11...e5 12.b3 Ng4 13.e4 f5 14.exf5 gxf5 15.h3 Nf6 16.Bb2 Qe8 17.Rae1** Topalov, on his first open tournament in 20 years (according to his own estimate), decides to take things rather easier than he usually does in elite events. He has what GMs are fond of referring to as a 'symbolic advantage'. **17...Qh5 18.f4 e4 19.Rf2 b6 20.Nf1 Nb7** In chess as in life, it's always later than you think. Here Black needs to address White's coming threat of g3-g4, undermining the e4-pawn in some way. One way to do this is 20...Qg6, adding support to the pawn. **21.Ne3 Nd8**



22.Qd2 Houdini is a strong advocate of 22.g4!? immediately when 22...fxg4?! 23.Nxe4 gxh3? 24.Bf3 Qg6+ 25.Kh1 would win with surprising rapidity for White. But humans, even the likes of a 2800-rated player, might find

a few analytical obstacles to iron out before committing to such a line. For one thing, 22...Qh4 looks hard to analyse. **22...Nf7 23.g4!**? Now it's less clear cut but still very tempting, and Topalov can resist everything except temptation. **23...fxg4 24.hxg4 Bxg4 24...Nxg4!**? 25.Nxg4 Qxg4 26.Nxe4 Bf5 looks tricky for Black but there seems to be no bone-crusher. **25.Nxe4 Nh6** After 25...Nxe4 26.Bxe4, the threat of Rg2 and the vulnerability of the g-file becomes too difficult to meet. **26.Nxd6 Bh3 26...Qh4 27.Be5 Bd7 28.Rf3** is more resilient but still leaves Black a pawn and a position down. **27.Bxh3 Qxh3 28.Rh2 Qd7 29.Rxh6! Qxd6** If 29...Bxh6 30.Nef5 and the threats of Re7 and Nxh6+ are decisive. **30.Nf5 Qd7 31.Re6 Ne4 31...Bxh6 32.Nxh6+ Kh8 33.Rxf6** wins. **32.Ne7+ Kf7 33.Qh2 1-0**

The second seed, top US grandmaster and former Gibraltar winner Hikaru Nakamura, played in a less controlled way against Serbian woman grandmaster Jovana Vojinovic, moving his queen numerous times in the opening – something which most chess coaches tell their pupils not to do – but the end result was the same as Hikaru won in the same number of moves (33) as the top seed. During the game commentators Simon Williams and Elisabeth Pähtz felt his approach might have been rather risky and scented a surprise result but, interviewed later, Hikaru played down the risk factor. You can judge for yourselves.

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J.Vojinovic (2301) - H.Nakamura (2776)

1.d4 f5 2.Bg5 c6 3.e3 Qb6 4.Nd2 Turning the opening into a gambit. It has been played a number of times, with varying degrees of success. **4...Qxb2 5.Rb1 Qc3 6.g4!**? In general White has scored quite well with 6.Bd3 here, but here she decides to raise the stakes still further. **6...Qa5 7.gxf5 Qxf5 8.h4 Qa5** That makes six queen moves in the first eight moves. Danny Gormally, writing on Twitter, commented "White has a huge lead in development. I don't think he'd do this against another top GM." **9.Nh3 g6 10.Bd3 d6 11.Qf3 Nd7** Finally Black moves a minor piece. Rating health warning: don't try this sort of thing until your rating reaches 2700. **12.h5 Ndf6** Black can't sensibly do anything about his pawn weakness on g6, for example 12...gxh5?? 13.Qxh5+ Kd8 14.Bxe7+ and the much-travelled queen drops off. But he can safely jettison it and walk to freedom on the queenside. **13.hxg6 hxg6 14.Bxg6+ Kd8 15.Bf4 Kc7 16.Ng5 Rxh1+ 17.Qxh1 Bh6 18.Qh4 Bd7**



Black has succeeded in unravelling his position. However, he has yet to demonstrate an edge. **19.Bd3?!** Black assumes the initiative after this. Instead, 19.c4 maintains some sort of momentum against the black king. For example, if 19...Qxa2 20.c5 and the d6-pawn is under further pressure. **19...Nd5 20.Ne6+ Bxe6 21.Bxh6 Nc3 22.Ra1 Qb4** The threat is simply Qb2 rounding up the rook. **23.Kf1 Nxa2 24.Rd1 Nc3 25.Re1 Nxh6 26.Qxh6 Bd7 27.f3 a5** There isn't much to be done about the threat of pushing the a-pawn all the way. **28.Kf2 a4 29.Qg5 Rh8 30.Qg3 Nd5 31.Rd1 c5 32.Bc4 Nc3 33.Re1 b5 0-1**

This pattern was followed by most of the other pro versus amateur games, with the notable exception of Badrakh Galmandakh of Mongolia against Russian grandmaster Alexander Motylev. The game had a most unusual beginning, with the queens being exchanged as early as the third move. This would not normally bother a seasoned grandmaster as they are used to grinding out wins in such positions, but in fact the 2240-rated Mongolian amateur proceeded to outplay his illustrious opponent over the course of a long game of 77 moves. At the end the Russian grandmaster tried a trick to force stalemate but it didn't save him.

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B. Galmandakh - A. Motylev



Black, in a hopeless situation, tried **74...Rf2** allowing his opponent to queen the pawn, thus **75.c8Q** Black now played **75...Re2+**, which can simply be taken by the king. If you are very naive indeed... there can't be many experienced players who haven't seen one of these tired old rook checking cheapoes to set up a stalemate, or who remember falling for one when they were a rookie. But when there's nothing else, and even if you're a Russian super-GM, you give it a try. **76.Kf4! Rf2+** Black would like to play 76...Re4+ to jettison the rook and create stalemate but White could then simply take it with the bishop - 77.Bxe4 - when suddenly the pawn on g3 can move. **77.Bf3 1-0** The bishop move unblocks the passage of Black's g-pawn so stalemate is off the menu.

Women's world champion Hou Yifan is playing at the Tradewise Gibraltar Festival for the second time. Her first time here, in 2012, was truly remarkable and a landmark for the women's game. On that occasion, despite being well down the list of likely winners in a very strong field, she succeeded in tying for first with Nigel Short on 8/10 (both of them were ahead of eleven players rated over 2700), though being edged out in the play-off. Along the way she defeated Judit Polgar and finished a full point ahead of her in the race for the prestigious women's prize. Judit, of course, has now retired from regular play but Hou Yifan is close to Judit's final rating and might in time succeed to Judit's title by universal acclamation – that of the greatest woman chess player who ever lived.

Hou Yifan is also attempting something of great import, having played in the Tata Steel A section in Wijk aan Zee immediately before coming to Gibraltar. Normally this is not possible as the two tournaments unfortunately overlap, but this year, uniquely Hou Yifan and her fellow country man Wei Yi (who jointly won the B section in Wijk) are attempting this 23-game marathon. Hou's endeavour is the greater one – the world's strongest closed tournament followed by the world's strongest open tournament.

Hou Yifan's first game here in Gibraltar, against German player Dr Hans-Jürg Cordes, wasn't propitious, but, as in football, sometimes it is a matter of winning ugly rather than playing good chess. Hou Yifan didn't seem to be winning until the final blunder by her opponent.

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Hou Yifan (2673) - H.J.Cordes (2262)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.f4 c5 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.Be3 Be7 8.Qd2 0-0 9.Be2 b6 10.0-0 f5 11.exf6 Nxf6 12.Kh1 Ne4 13.Qe1 Bb7 14.dxc5 Nxc3 15.Qxc3 bxc5 16.Bxc5 Rxf4 17.Nd4 Rxf1+ 18.Rxf1 Bxc5 19.Qxc5 Nxd4 20.Qxd4 Qd6 21.Bg4 e5 22.Qf2 Qe7 23.c3 Bc6 24.h3 Rd8 25.Re1 Re8 26.Bd1 g6 27.a4 Rf8 28.Qe3 Kg7 29.b4 Re8 30.b5 Ba8 31.a5 Qd7 32.Qc5 d4 33.Bg4 Qf7 34.Kg1 Qf4



Level material but an imbalanced pawn structure. Even so Black doesn't seem to be in any danger of losing. **35.cxd4 h5! 36.Qxa7+** White decides to give up her bishop for the pawns. **36...Kh6 37.dxe5 hxg4 38.Qe3 Kg5?? 1-0** An unfortunate blunder. After **38...Qxe3+ 39.Rxe3 gxh3 40.gxh3 Rb8**, it is far from clear how White can prove a win. **39.h4+** **39.h4+ Kf5 40.Rf1** is conclusive.

APRÈS-CHESS!

Of course, the Tradewise Gibraltar Chess Festival is not just about chess. Just as skiing has après-ski, so chess in Gibraltar has après-chess (or should that be après-échecs?). The treat after round one for many of the elite players (and indeed quite a lot of the non-elite ones – this is an equal opportunities chess tournament) was an invitation to a formal dinner at the Rock Hotel, with drinks poolside before proceeding to a large marquee set in the hotel's garden, comfortably decked out in Moroccan style. The cuisine was also in the Moroccan style and your reporter ate rather too many of the delicious dessert cakes than was consistent with his current diet (don't tell the wife, she doesn't read my *oeuvre*). Gentlemen (and ladies) now abed in England, New York or other chilly parts of the world at the moment should think themselves accursed that they are not currently living the high life here in Gibraltar. There's always 2016... you know you want to... because you're worth it...

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