

PRESS RELEASE

London Chess Classic, Round 5

SUPER FABI GOES BALLISTIC, OTHERS LOSE THEIR FOCUS...

John Saunders reports: The fifth round of the 9th London Chess Classic, played on Wednesday 6 December 2017 at the Olympia Conference Centre, saw US number one Fabiano Caruana forge clear of the field by a point after winning his second game in a row, this time against ex-world champion Vishy Anand.



Tournament leader Fabiano Caruana talks to Maurice Ashley in the studio (photo Lennart Ootes)

It's starting to look like a one-man tournament. Caruana has won two games, the other nine competitors not one between them. We've only just passed the mid-point of the tournament, of course, so it could all go wrong for him yet but it would require a sea change in the pacific nature of the tournament for this to happen. Minds are starting to go back to Fabi's wonder tournament, the Sinquefield Cup of 2014 when he scored an incredible $8\frac{1}{2}/10$ to finish a Grand Canyon in points ahead of Carlsen, Topalov, Aronian, Vachier-Lagrave and Nakamura. That amounted to a tournament performance rating of 3103 which is so off the scale for these things that it doesn't even register on the brain as a feasible Elo number. Only super-computers usually scale those heights. For Fabi to

replicate that achievement he would have to win all his remaining games in London. But he won't be worrying about the margin of victory so much as finishing first. He needs to keep his mind on his game and I won't jinx his tournament any further with more effusive comments.



Fabiano Caruana and Vishy Anand shake hands before their round five game (photo Lennart Ootes)

Caruana's win against Vishy Anand follows. The Indian star had the good grace to visit the commentary room and answer a few questions but he was understandably disappointed with his play towards the end of the game. It was another triumph for Fabiano's positive, confident play from what looked a fairly innocuous opening, creating a position that was imbalanced and just sharp enough to induce a few errors when the pressure built up.

London Classic, Round 5, 06.12.2017

White: Fabiano Caruana

Black: Viswanathan Anand

Ruy Lopez C65

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nf6 The Berlin Wall goes up. Which reminds me, in March 2018 eight candidates will assemble in Berlin to decide the challenger to Magnus Carlsen's world title, but Vishy Anand will not be one of them. Four of the Candidates – Karjakin, Aronian, Caruana and So – are in the current London line-up. **4.d3** This way of

avoiding the Berlin endgame is starting to become the more fashionable treatment against the Berlin though 4.0-0 still heavily outnumbers it on the database.

4...Bc5 5.Nc3 At an adjacent board 5.Bg5 was being played by Carlsen against Wesley So. **5...0-0 6.Bxc6 dxc6 7.h3 Nd7 8.Be3 Bd6 9.Ne2** 9.Qd2 c5 10.0-0 Nb8 11.Nh2 Nc6 was the continuation in Adams-Caruana at the Gashimov Memorial tournament in Shamkir in 2015 and ended in a fairly uneventful draw. **9...Re8** 9...c5 10.Ng3 has been played for White by So and Karjakin. **10.g4!?** Aggressive intent from Caruana, though it



could be said to weaken kingside squares and make it impossible to castle on that side. No matter: White intends to castle on the other side. **10...Nc5 11.Ng3 Ne6 12.Nf5** Engines tend to favour Black but this may be because they value bishops above knights rather more than is strictly logical. **12...c5 13.h4 (diagram)** GM Simon Williams is not on commentary duty at the Classic, busy playing his own chess in the open tournament, but I can easily imagine him getting animated at the sight of this h-pawn being launched down the board. And rightly so

– it's good, brave chess from Caruana. **13...a5 14.h5** There goes 'Harry' - I'm starting to channel my own internal GingerGM. It feels good. **14...Ra6** The rook keeps a wary eye on what's happening on the other side of the board. **15.Qd2 Nd4 16.Rh3 Bf8 17.0-0-0 Be6 18.Kb1 f6** I've a feeling that most amateurs, including me, would be thinking "he's attacking me on the kingside so I ought to be countering on the queenside and play 18...b5 or perhaps 18...a4. Anand prefers to make a precautionary move on the kingside, though it might also be viewed as a target for White's pawn front to chip at. These are all difficult positional decisions which engines can't necessarily help you with. But perhaps [the scary new AI chess engine AlphaZero](#) could, given the odd ten minutes or so to think about it. **19.c3 Nxf3 20.Rxf3 c4 21.Qc2** Watching this in real time, with benefit of silicon, I favoured 21.d4 but after 21...exd4 22.Bxd4 c5 23.Be3 Qxd2 24.Rxd2 a4 and White has nothing special. The e4-pawn looks a bit vulnerable. **21...cxd3 22.Rxd3 Qc8 23.g5** White forces open the g-file, which proves to be highly advantageous later, though it perhaps shouldn't have been had Black played better. **23...fxg5 24.Bxg5 Bf7 25.h6** White is determined to open up the g-file for future operations. He's playing with great self-confidence, perhaps buoyed up by his win of the previous day. **25...gxh6**

26.Bc1 The equation is simply: White has given up a pawn but it is only doubled and on the edge of the board. His king is reasonably safe but his opponent's potentially vulnerable, though not at this exact moment in time. It looks like a good value sac but will need accurate following up. **26...Qe6** Black has counterplay and here he forces a weakening of White's queenside pawn structure. **27.b3 a4 28.c4 axb3 29.axb3** Now Black has engineered a dangerous open file for his rooks for himself, so the position is delicately balanced, with all three results still possible. **29...Qc6 30.Rg3+ Kh8 31.Rd1 b5**



(diagram) 32.c5 Instead 32.Bb2 is the engine's favourite and, after 32...bxc4, the surprising 33.Rd8!? when I'll leave the reader to work out the various tactics available should Black be unwise enough to capture anything. But Black can continue blithely with 33...Ra5 when the computer register +0.00 and equality. **32...b4?!** Anand thought for six of his remaining 24 minutes on this but both players thought it was the start of the slide for Black. 32...Qxc5 33.Qxc5 Bxc5

34.Rd7 Bg6 35.Bxh6 Bf8 is nothing special for White. "After 32...b4 all my moves were blunders," said a despondent Vishy. **33.Bb2 Bg6?** 33...Ra5 is the only way to go, though White again has the scary 34.Rd8! when Black must play 34...Qxc5 35.Rxe8 Qxc2+ 36.Kxc2 Bxe8 37.f4 Bg6 38.fxe5 which is maybe not as bad as it looks. **34.Rd5** After this, Black is probably just lost because the threats to e5. **34...Qb5** If 34...Bxf5? 35.Rxe5! is devastating. **35.Rg1 c6** 35...Bg7 36.Nxg7 Kxg7 37.f4! is a winner. **36.Rxe5 Rxe5 37.Bxe5+**



Kg8 38.Bd4 38.Bb2, preparing to get the queen to d8 via d2, is more conclusive. **38...Kf7 39.Nh4 1-0 (diagram)**

Caruana was surprised by Anand's resignation at this point but it is clear that White should win fairly quickly as Black can't really prevent inroads into his kingside in a move or two.

That turned out to be the game of the round. Often the likeliest contender for this unofficial title is identifiable quite early in proceedings but in round five the best tip for the title would have been Aronian-Vachier-Lagrave which was quite lively and favoured the Frenchman for much of its course. He gave up two pawns for a dangerous counter-attack but nothing concrete or convincing emerged and he settled for a repetition when his winning chances appeared to have ebbed away.



Levon Aronian vs Maxime Vachier-Lagrave looked good for the Frenchman but he couldn't land the coup de grâce (photo Lennart Ootes)

We witnessed our first Magnus grind of the tournament as the world champion attempted to apply thumbscrews to Wesley So but last year's Classic winner hung in there and drew. The opening was a Ruy Lopez, Berlin Defence, as previously mentioned in the notes above and soon became a game of manoeuvre. But Magnus's opponents seem more confident of keeping him at bay when he attempts to

torture them and Wesley avoided all the snares set for him in a long game of 68 moves.



Carlsen ground away at So but the US player's defences held (photo Lennart Ootes)

The two Russians, Nepomniachtchi and Karjakin, played a Classical Nimzo-Indian which only deviated from known moves on move 16 in a broadly symmetrical, lifeless sort of position. Adams-Nakamura was a Dragon Sicilian and slightly more enterprising, featuring an early ...d5 and following a Caruana-Nakamura game from 2015 for about 14 moves, and known lines till about move 20, by which time a fairly solid position had emerged. The draw was agreed on move 32.

Scores after Round 5: Caruana 3½, Adams, Aronian, Carlsen, Nakamura, Nepomniachtchi, So, Vachier-Lagrave 2½, Anand, Karjakin 2.

Wednesday was a rest day in the British KO Championship, in which David Howell holds a lead over Luke McShane, having drawn the first game and won the second. They resume on Thursday when the Classicists are enjoying their own day of rest.

The two players on 5/5 overnight in the London FIDE Open, Hrant Melkumyan (Armenia) and Jahongir Vakhidov (Uzbekistan) drew their sixth round game and have now been caught on 5½/6 by Jonathan Hawkins of England who beat Matthieu Cornette of France.

Thursday 7 December is a REST DAY in the London Classic elite event: other festival competitions continue at the venue. **Round six** of the London Classic takes place on **Friday 8 December** at 16.00 UK time.



Star poker player [Liv Boeree](#) paid a visit to the tournament and told Maurice Ashley about her love for chess (photo Lennart Ootes)

ENDS

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