



TRADEWISE GIBRALTAR CHESS FESTIVAL

Monday 22 January - Thursday 1 February 2018

Round 6 Report: Sunday 28 January 2018 - by John Saunders (@JohnChess)

Nakamura and Howell Share a Scotch on the Rock

It's still very much the Nakamura show here at the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters but in round six his streak of wins was brought to an end when he drew with England's David Howell. As regards the race for the women's first prize Ju Wenjun has moved ahead of her rivals and, like Nakamura, is currently the favourite to win and repeat her success of 2017.

The Nakamura-Howell pairing was a case of history repeating itself. Back in 2015 the two of them met in round seven, with Nakamura on 6/6 and again Howell brought his streak to an end with a draw. Hikaru was a little miffed on that occasion though the setback did not affect his overall result as he won the tournament with 8½/10, followed by Howell on 8 in what was one of the best performances, if not *the* best, of the young Englishman's career so far. Their 2018 game was again highly intense, with the players expending exorbitant amounts of time in the opening – a Scotch – and leaving Howell in particular with only seconds and the increment to reach the time control with about 15 moves left. Thankfully for him the position had clarified sufficiently for him to be able to get away with his perilous clock handing but earlier in the game he missed a shot (15...Nxc2!?) which might have given him the advantage. By the same token it was horribly complex and he might have used up even more time had he played it and stirred up a veritable hornet's nest.

The top five boards all resulted in draws. Antipov had a long battle with Harikrishna in which the Russian GM nearly came to grief around move 40 but still had enough after sacrificing an exchange for a pawn to hold the draw. This glut of draws enabled three players to join Howell and Antipov in the second score group on 5: Chanda Sandipan, Wang Hao and Ivan Saric. Wang Hao managed to eke out a win at the end of a long struggle with SL Narayanan, who went astray around move 54, allowing a liquidation into a lost king and pawn endgame when he had chances to save had he kept rooks and bishops on the board.

Sandipan had a surprisingly easy passage against Ivanchuk, who went astray and faced a lost endgame as early as move 23. It followed a striking (but not altogether convincing) opening novelty by the Indian GM which must have shaken the mercurial Ukrainian. He played 12.Nxa4, giving up two pieces for a rook and a pawn after 12...Rxa4 13.Bb5+, etc. Really? If that works, I'm a Barbary Macaque's posterior.

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C.Sandipan (2579) - V.Ivanchuk (2726)

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e3 c5 5.Nge2 cxd4 6.exd4 d5 7.c5 Ne4 8.Bd2 Nxd2 9.Qxd2 a5 10.a3 Bxc3 11.Nxc3 a4 (diagram)



12.Nxa4!? If this really is good, then I vote we call this the Barbary Macaque's Posterior variation. White usually develops his bishop to d3 or maybe b5. Interestingly, White thought for around 35 minutes about this, so maybe he invented it at the board. Or wanted his opponent to think that. **12...Rxa4** Ivanchuk didn't take long to do this since he's little choice anyway. **13.Bb5+ Bd7 14.Bxa4 Bxa4 15.Qb4 Qd7 16.0-0 Qb5!?** I find it



difficult to understand why Black didn't just get on with his development and play 16...0-0 here. It's far from clear what White has after that. Was Ivanchuk worried about a snap attack on his king, should it come to g8, with a rook lift or two, a queen relocation to the kingside and a swift g4-pawn advance, say? Looks far-fetched to me. **17.b3 Qxb4 18.axb4 Bb5 19.Ra7!** Sandipan gives up more material to grab the initiative with this rook. **19...Bxf1 20.Rxb7 Nc6 21.Kxf1 (diagram)**

21...0-0? This game may become known as Ivanchuk's great castling fiasco. When he should have castled, he didn't, and now he shouldn't, he does.

Admittedly, the right move as prescribed by the engines is not at all intuitive, but on his best form I would have backed an imaginative player of Ivanchuk's quality to have found it: 21...Rf8! After this Black should hold. It enables him to move his king towards the rook without having to worry about checks on the back rank (after the knight moves), thus keeping the king in touch with the coming pawn advances. **22.b5! Na5** After 22...Nxd4 23.c6 White simply advances c7 and Rb8 and it is all over. Any attempt to blockade on c8 will be refuted by the advance of the b-pawn. **23.Rc7! 1-0** 23...Rb8 24.b4 Nb7 25.Rd7 wins comfortably; 23...Nxb3 24.b6 Na5 25.c6 followed by b7 and Rc8 wins.

Ivan Saric against Nino Batsiashvili was equally sharp as well as short in length. The Georgian player chose to defend the Steinitz deferred variation of the Ruy Lopez, and anyone wondering why this variation doesn't find favour at the elite level might care to have a look at this game. The Croatian opted for the sharpest line 6.c4. Batsiashvili tried to apply pressure along the g1-a7 diagonal but Saric's energetic play soon had her in a tight grip.

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I.Saric (2664) - N.Batsiashvili (2504)

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 d6 5.0-0 Bd7 6.c4 6.c3 is seen more often, perhaps because it is a standard kneejerk move in so many Lopez positions, but the text scores more heavily in practice. **6...Nf6 7.Nc3 Bg4** It is tempting to try and exploit White's weakness on d4 but White gets a strong kingside attack by way of compensation. 7...Be7 does a little better in practice. **8.h3 Bxf3 9.Qxf3 Nd7 10.Qg3 Nd4** We're now in new territory. Black has secured the d4 square and now plans to exploit it along the g1-a7 diagonal, while White puts his faith in the opening of the f-file. **11.f4 c6 12.d3 Qb6** The queen soon gets into difficulties on this square. Engines seem to advocate 12...g6 but one wonders whether that plays into White's hand on the kingside. Might be worth a try, though. **13.Be3!?** Offering a poisoned pawn on b2. Whether the poison is lethal is not clear. **13...0-0-0** After 13...Qxb2 14.Bxd4 exd4 White has the very tricky 15.Nd5! when the prospects are unclear. **14.Rab1 Nc5? (diagram)**



Too provocative. Black needs to complete her development with something like 14...g6 though White would probably have an advantage. **15.b4! Nxd3 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.Rxf7** Black is probably just lost now as she hardly has a useful move available to her. **17...h5 18.Kh1** This frees the c3 knight for active service as it had been tied to the defence of e2 where Black had threatened a family fork. **18...Bxb4** A desperate throw, perhaps hoping something would turn up in the complications. **19.a3 a5 20.axb4 axb4 21.Bc2 Nf4 22.Ra1** 22.Ra1 Mate in one is threatened. If 22...Kb8 23.Bxf4 soon mates. **1-0**

Today's theme seems to be short, brutal games so I couldn't resist appending this one.

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H.Raja (2427) - G.Antova (2260)

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e6 7.g4 Setting the tone for the game. **7...b5 8.Bg2 Bb7 9.a3 Nfd7 10.h4!?** Enter, Harry the h-pawn. He's going to have a really good game. **10...Nb6 11.g5 d5?!** This looks too provocative. Development is better. **12.h5 e5** Perhaps Black was trying to comply with that old

saying about "the best way to counter an attack on the flank is to mount one in the centre." Maybe, but not while your king is still on e8. Or perhaps Black was focused on the possible fork on d4. Either way she is going to be disappointed. A possible idea is 12...Nc4!? but then White can continue with 13.Qe2 when 13...Nxb2 14.exd5 looks good for White. **13.h6!** Harry's last move but a good one. The pressure on g7, and subsequently tricks against the exposed rook on h8, create a number of potent tactical possibilities for White. **13...gxh6** One point behind 13.h6 is that 13...exd4 can be answered by 14.Qxd4 threatening the b6 knight and a fork on g7. **14.exd5 Nxd5 (diagram)**



Looks not bad for Black but White now has a star move. 14...exd4 15.Bxd4 (15.Qxd4 is also good) 15...Rg8 16.Qe2+ Qe7 17.Ne4! wins. **15.Nc6!! Nxc6** 15...Bxc6 16.Nxd5 Bxd5 17.Bxd5 threatens Bxa8 and Bxf7+ winning the queen. **16.Bxd5** Spoiling the effect somewhat. 16.Nxd5! is decisive, with threats of Nf6+ and Bb6. **16...hgx5** 16...Qd7 17.Qf3 0-0-0 18.0-0-0 Nd4 is some sort of defence but White still stands much better. **17.Qf3 Qc7 18.Qf6 b4 19.Bb6!** 19.Qxh8? bxc3 is not all over. **19...Qd7** 19...Qxb6 20.Bxf7+ Kd7 21.Qe6+ Kc7 22.Nd5+ wins the house. **20.0-0-0 1-0** Castles immediately followed by 'resigns' is always a nice touch. If 20...bxc3 21.Bxc6 cxb2+ 22.Kb1 and the queen cannot recapture on c6 because of mate on d8.

Scores after round 6: Nakamura (USA) 5½/6, Antipov (Russia), Howell (England), Wang Hao (China), Saric (Croatia), Sandipan (India) 5. Leading women's score: Ju Wenjun (China) 4½.

A selection of photos from round six can be downloaded from the Flickr collections of [John Saunders](#) or [Sophie Triay](#).

Video footage and interviews from today's round are available to view and/or embed from the Tradewise Gibraltar [YouTube Channel](#).

Report Ends

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