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PRESS RELEASE

London Chess Classic, Round 1

ALL QUIET ON THE GOOGLE FRONT

John Saunders reports: The first round of the 9th London Chess Classic, played at Google's London HQ in Pancras Square, saw all five games drawn. The tournament now takes an early rest day, allowing the tournament to migrate its equipment to the more familiar setting of the Olympia Conference Centre in Kensington in time for round two which takes place on Sunday 3 December at 14.00 London time.

It was a little disappointing that Google's state-of-the-art City venue could not have been rewarded with some more exciting headlines for its generosity in hosting the opening round of the Classic but that is often the way with our game when played at its most stratospheric level. The same thing happened in round three of August's Sinquefeld Cup in Saint Louis, which featured nine of the ten players who now line up in London. It wasn't for the want of trying, at least on a couple of the boards. Look closer and you'll find the latter stages of one of them was a humdinger.

Making the ceremonial first move was Demis Hassabis, co-founder of host company DeepMind, which is now the AI wing of Google. He chose 1.c4 for Magnus Carlsen, though the world champion was later to retract it and substitute 1.d4. Also present for the formalities was Garry Kasparov, who, like Demis Hassabis, had taken part in the previous day's Pro-Biz Cup and was having difficulties tearing himself away from such a prestigious chess event. He stayed most of the day and even assisted Daniel King and Lawrence Trent in the commentary room.

The game between Wesley So and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave was the first to finish. The US player opted for a sort of unambitious English/Double Fianchetto system in which the queens came off early and the pawn structure more or less symmetrical. The game soon petered out to a draw.

Nepomniachtchi versus Aronian took longer in time but lasted fewer moves (28 – not a breach of the 30-move rule as it involved a repetition). This was a Ruy Lopez which



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followed the recent game MVL-Aronian from the third round of their FIDE World Cup semi-final, until move 17 when the Armenian diverged from his earlier effort which he had lost. He later explained that “generally I like playing something that brought me unhappiness in the past because I want to rehabilitate the openings.” That said, we have to remember that this loss hadn’t really brought him too much unhappiness since he bounced back to win the match and the tournament. The draw with Black against the young Russian won’t have affected his chances in the Grand Chess Tour, especially since the two rivals above him, Carlsen and MVL, also drew. Nepomniachtchi, making his British debut as a player (though he seconded for Carlsen here in 2012, so we are told) opted for a draw in a position in which he might have held an infinitesimal advantage of the type that Carlsen might try to nurse during a long grind but others understandably decide is unwinnable.

Adams-Karjakin ended on move 30 by which time the position reached featured a rook and two knights apiece plus symmetrical pawns. Adams opened with a patriotic 1.c4 and the game transposed into something resembling a Queen’s Gambit Accepted. It took leave of the book on move 17, departing from play in a game won by the rising Indian super-GM Vidit against Batchuluun earlier in 2017. Adams was self-deprecating and we’ll leave him with the last word: “I am happy to get on the scoreboard but it wasn't so impressive.”

That left us with two games but these provided some quality entertainment even if they did not result in blood being spilt. A couple of cagey moves, one by Carlsen (7.Be2) and one by Caruana (8...b6) enabled the players to escape the strictures of theory very early in proceedings. The game never quite caught fire but it had some merit along the way.

London Classic 9th London (1.1), 01.12.2017

□ Magnus Carlsen

■ Fabiano Caruana

Queen’s Gambit Accepted D27

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 Nf6 4.Bxc4 e6 5.Nf3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.Be2 It seems a bit strange to play a second move with this bishop without being forced to do so, and it has not found general favour in this line. Aronian also played it, at the last Sinquefeld Cup in August, but he went on to lose to Caruana. Curiously, Garry Kasparov also played it once, but only in a simul. **7...Nbd7 8.Nc3 b6** 8...b5 has featured a quite a number of games between top-level players but this takes the game out of theory. **9.e4 cxd4 10.Nxd4 Bb7 11.Be3 Bc5** Snatching the pawn with 11...Nxe4 doesn’t lead to instant refutation but nevertheless Black would be seriously behind in development after 12.Nxe4 Bxe4 13.Bf3 Bxf3 14.Qxf3 Bc5 15.Rad1 0-0 16.b4!, etc. **12.f3 0-0 13.Qe1 Rc8 14.Qf2 b5 15.Rac1 Qe7 16.a4 bxa4 17.Nxa4 Bd6 18.Nb3** One of those positions

where you sense that White is starting to get a grip without being able to pinpoint where Black could be said to have gone wrong. That said, Black is still a long way from being at a serious disadvantage.

18...Bc6 19.Nc3 Rb8 20.Na5 Ba8 21.Nc4 After 21.Bxa6 Black has a small tactic to regain the pawn:

21...Bxh2+ 22.Kxh2 Qd6+ 23.Kg1 Qxa6, etc. **21...Bc5 22.Rfd1 Rfc8 23.Na4 Bxe3 24.Qxe3 Qb4 25.Qa3 h6**

After 25...Qxa3 26.Nxa3 Caruana would have to reckon with the long-term effects of Carlsenic poisoning of his position. With the world champion, you are never very far away from being on the wrong side of one of his speciality grids in which he seems able to conjure something out of not very much. **26.Kf1** The computer is superficially attracted to 26.Ncb6 Qxa3 27.Rxc8+ Rxc8 28.bxa3 Nxb6 29.Nxb6 Rb8 30.Nxa8 Rxa8 31.Rc1 but that doesn't look particularly 'grindworthy' from a Carlsen perspective. He would need more material to work with. **26...g5 27.Rc3 a5 28.Qxb4** 28.Qa1!? was a suggestion of Kasparov's in the commentary room. It sounded as though he didn't fully embrace it as a move but it was more an attempt to understand what



Carlsen's idea might be. The actual move played came as a surprise. **28...axb4**

28...Rxb4 29.Ra1 puts pressure on the a5-pawn. **29.Rcc1 Kf8 30.Na5 Ke7 31.Kf2**

Rxc1 32.Rxc1 (diagram) Around here in the commentary room, Malcolm Pein punted 32...Ne8. "No, no," countered Kasparov, typically looking to go forward and dismissing a move that committed a third knight to the edge of the board. Commentators King and Trent chimed in with the former world champion's opinion. At this point the tournament director, being a busy man, had to leave on other business and it was a minute or so after he departed that Caruana

played... **32...Ne8** ... to a chorus of rueful laughter from the three commentators. "Just as well Malcolm wasn't here - how he would have gloated!" exclaimed one of them (identity concealed to ensure his ongoing employment status). Actually, I then popped out of the room to see if I could locate Malcolm and bring him back for a well-merited gloat but sadly he was nowhere to be found. **33.Ke3 Nd6** White has a nominal edge but the Pein plan seems to work well enough. **34.Nc5 Rc8 35.Nab3 f5 36.Nxd7 Rxc1 37.Nxc1 Kxd7 38.Nd3 fxe4 39.fxe4 Ke7 40.e5 Nf5+ 41.Kf2 Nd4 42.Bd1 b3 43.Nb4** Black's b-pawn looks vulnerable but he can counter any threats against it by menacing the e5-pawn, e.g. 43.g3 Bd5 44.Ke3 Nc6 45.Kd2 Bc4, etc. **43...Bd5 44.g3 Bc4 45.Ke3 Nf5+ 46.Ke4 Kd7 47.g4 Ne7 48.Kd4 Bf1 49.Bxb3 Be2 50.h3 Bf1 51.Nd3 Nc6+ 52.Kc5!** Rather a witty way to conclude the game. At first sight the world champion seems to have left a piece *en prise* but he has it all worked out. **52...Bxd3 53.Ba4 Be4 54.Kb6 Bd5** ½-½ Though White cannot regain his piece by force, Black can never relieve the siege on the c6-knight and is left with no way of making progress.

The game of the day was Nakamura-Anand. It didn't look as though it would provide as much entertainment as it did for about three quarters of its course but when Nakamura rashly/boldly (select the adverb of your choice) started to launch his kingside pawns down the board in order to expose the enemy king, things started to hot up. It is debatable whether it was an objectively justified plan since Black was able to grab a pawn and hang on to it, but it required some precise play from Anand to see him through the complications. In particular, his brinksmanship in stopping the white king from moving away from the h-file to reveal a deadly mate from the h1-rook was a wonder to behold. No decisive games, then, but by the powers vested in me by the

tournament I hereby confer honorary decisive game status on this splendid tussle. Well played, Hikaru and Vishy.

London Classic 9th London (Round 1), 01.12.2017

□ Hikaru Nakamura

■ Viswanathan Anand

Reversed Grünfeld A05

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.g3 d5 3.Bg2 c5 4.0-0 g6 5.d4 cxd4 6.Nxd4 Bg7 7.Nb3 Nc6 8.Nc3 e6 9.e4 d4 9...Nxe4 10.Nxe4 dxe4 11.Qxd8+ Kxd8 12.Bxe4 was played in Oparin-Esserman in Gibraltar in February, and ended in a draw.

10.Na4 0-0 11.c3 dxc3 12.Nxc3 e5 Symmetrical but for the fact that White's kingside knight has made a couple more moves than its Black counterpart, though without necessarily being able to claim that it is better located. 13.Be3 Bg4 14.f3 Be6 15.Nc5 Qe7 16.Nxe6 Qxe6 17.Qd2 Rfd8 18.Qf2 Bf8 19.h3 At first sight this doesn't look to be doing the light-squared bishop any favours but White has an ambitious plan for the kingside which is not immediately obvious to ordinary mortals. 19...Bb4 20.Rac1 Rd3 21.Rfd1 Rad8

22.Rxd3 Rxd3 23.Bf1 Rd8 24.a3 Be7 25.g4 Kg7 26.Kh2 h6 27.h4 Nd4 28.g5 Quite a risky plan as Black can regroup to attack the residual pawn on g5. But White is looking for counterplay in the shape of a direct attack on the black king. 28...hxg5 29.hxg5 Nh7 30.Bh3 One upside of the bold White plan is that the light-squared bishop can find activity again. 30...Qb3 31.f4 Nc6 Black must retreat in order to exchange on f4 and make the g5-pawn vulnerable to attack. 32.Nd5 32.Rg1 may be safer but Black still can try 32...exf4 33.Bxf4 Bxa3 when it looks like he can get away with the pawn capture. 32...exf4 33.Bxf4 Bxg5 After 33...Nxc5 34.Rc3 Qd1!?, the tactics get a bit tricky: 35.Nxe7 Nxe4 36.Qg2, etc, is just one possibility that would require



analysis. 34.Bxg5 Nxc5 35.Qf6+ Kh6 (*diagram*) The situation looks a trifle precarious for the black king but there seems to be no way to exploit its predicament. 36.Bg2 The computer finds a neat line which would probably be beyond the analytical powers of a human: 36.Rc3! Qxb2+ 37.Bg2 Ne5! 38.Rh3+! (38.Qxd8? Ng4+ leads to mate; 38.Qxe5? Nf3+ is a delicious fork/pin winning the queen) 38...Nxc3 39.Qh4+ Kg7 40.Qf6+ with a beautifully geometric perpetual check pattern. 36...Nh7! Otherwise the white rook comes to h1 and delivers mate or huge material loss down the h-file. 37.Qxf7 Rf8 38.Qc7 Qxb2 39.Rh1 Qf2 Another only

move: Black must stop the white king discovering a check along the h-file. 40.Kh3 Renewing the threat but it may not be best. Instead 40.Rf1 Qh4+ 41.Kg1 Rxf1+ 42.Kxf1 should lead to a draw. 40...Rf7 Giving the king a safe square on g7, attacking the queen and protecting the b7-pawn. White also has to worry about the threat of Ng5+ when his own king is suddenly in danger of being mated. 41.Qg3 Qb2 Given the vulnerability of both kings, computers start conjuring weird tactics out of the air. One such is 41...Ng5+ 42.Kg4+ Kg7 43.Qh2 and now 43...Nh3! 44.Kxh3 (44.Qxh3?? Ne5+ 45.Kg5 Qd2+ 46.Kh4 Rf4+! leads to mate) 44...Kg8! teeing up ...Rh7+, when White has to play 45.Qg3! Rh7+ 46.Kg4 Ne5+ 47.Qxe5 Qxg2+ and a draw ensues. 42.Ne3 Nf6 43.Bf3 Kh7 44.Nf5!? (*diagram*) ½-½ If Black takes the bait with 44...gxf5? 45.Rh2!, the queen has to be given up for the rook since he can't allow Kg2 with mate. However, after 45...Qxh2+ 46.Kxh2 fxe4 Black should still survive.



Meanwhile, at a hotel to the west of London, there commenced another high-level chess event: the British Knock-Out Championship. This is an eight-player competition featuring seven of Britain's top GMs plus a qualifier from the 4NCL Congress held some weeks ago in Coventry. The qualifier was IM Alan Merry, who found himself facing the 2016 British Knock-Out Champion Nigel Short who, back in the mists of time, had knocked the likes of Karpov and Timman out of the World Championship Candidates' competition when it too was played on a knock-out basis. A daunting prospect for the young man and he was duly put to the sword by former world championship runner-up to the tune of 2-0. At least, that's what the scoreboard would have one believe but a closer examination of the moves shows that at least one golden opportunity for Merry went begging.

British KO Ch London (1.1), 01.12.2017

□ Nigel Short

■ Alan Merry

Torre Attack A48



1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.Bg5 Bg7 4.Nbd2 d5 5.e3 0-0 6.c3 b6 7.Bd3 c5 8.b4 Nbd7 9.0-0 Bb7 10.Qb1 c4 11.Bc2 b5 12.a4 a6 13.Re1 Re8 14.e4 dxe4 15.Nxe4 Nb6 16.Bxf6 exf6 17.a5 Nd5 18.Nc5 Bc6 19.Be4 (*diagram left*) 19...Rxe4!? An enterprising exchange for pawn sacrifice. 20.Qxe4 Nxb4 21.Qb1 Nd5 22.Qc1 h5 23.Kh1 Kh7 24.Ng1 It is difficult to see how White is supposed to unravel his pieces. 24...Bh6 25.Qc2 Nf4 26.f3 Ra7 27.Qf2 Nd5 28.Ra3 This rook has rather a demeaning role as custodian of the a5 and c3 pawns. 28...f5 29.h4 Re7 30.Re2

Bc1! Loosening the white pawn structure with what should have been deadly effect. 31.Ra1 Be3 32.Qe1 (*diagram right*) 32...Bf4?? Now was the time to strike with 32...b4! when 33.cxb4 c3 34.Nh3 Bb5 and Black is having all the fun. 33.Rxe7 Nxe7 34.Nh3 Bh6 35.Nxa6 Black's advantage has withered on the vine and now White is in command. 35...f4 36.Nb4 Ba8 37.a6 Nf5 38.a7 Nxh4 39.Qe5 Nxf3!? A good cheapo try but White doesn't have to capture. 40.Qb8! 40.gxf3?? Qh4! would turn the tables. 40...Qh4 41.Qxa8 Ng5 42.Qc8 f3 43.a8Q 1-0



Merry reached a very decent position in the return game but it too was marred by a serious blunder which allowed a deadly pin.

Jonathan Rowson's ring rust told on him in his first encounter with Matthew Sadler and a vigorous kingside pawn advance soon scored the point. In the return game Rowson was unable to make any impression on the English player and a draw was good enough to steer Sadler through to the semi-finals.

In the semis Matthew Sadler will meet David Howell who beat Jonathan Hawkins by a similar score. In the first game queens were exchanged early but nevertheless Howell managed to engineer dangerous queenside play against the enemy king. An exchange sacrifice bore fruit in the shape of a trapped knight and Hawkins' position was overrun. Like Rowson he was unable to conjure up enough play in the return game for more than a draw.



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Last but not least was Gawain Jones versus Luke McShane. The first game was drawn as McShane held with Black but the second game was a titanic affair of 125 moves, 93 of which consisted of an opposite bishop ending in which McShane had two extra pawns. Gruelling stuff, and a hard way to go out for Gawain Jones. For Luke McShane it was sweet revenge for losing the 2017 British (non-KO) Championship play-off to Jones. He will meet Nigel Short in the semi-finals, which start on Saturday.

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About Chess in Schools and Communities

Chess in Schools and Communities (CSC) is a UK charity whose mission is to improve children's educational outcomes and social development by introducing them to the game of chess. Founded in 2009, CSC now teaches in over 300 schools and supports 500 more nationwide.

CSC also organises a world-class tournament, the London Chess Classic, and Yes2Chess, an international tournament for schools.

For more information visit: Chessinschools.co.uk.

About the London Chess Classic

The London Chess Classic is the flagship annual event of Chess in Schools and Communities. As the UK's largest chess tournament and the concluding leg of the Grand Chess Tour, an international circuit of high-profile chess events inspired by the legendary Garry Kasparov, the event brings with it enormous prestige in the chess community.

Alongside this competition amongst the world's best players, Chess in Schools and Communities runs a range of amateur and age-grade competitions for 1,000s of children from the charity initiative nationwide.

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