



TRADEWISE GIBRALTAR CHESS FESTIVAL

Monday 22 January - Thursday 1 February 2018

Round 7 Report: *Monday 29 January 2018 - by John Saunders (@JohnChess)*

Howelling Gale in Gibraltar

The Tradewise Gibraltar Chess Festival can usually reckon to be the major local news story for its duration but today we were upstaged by the elements. A howling gale blew across the rock all day, ripping scaffolding from high buildings, bringing rocks down from on high, flooding low-lying areas of the docks and closing roads either side of the chess venue so that many players other than we lucky people who reside in the Caleta Hotel were unable to journey to the venue on time.

The organisers took prompt action to ensure that play in round seven went ahead on time where two players were at the board, and where one or both players were missing, the players were granted an hour's grace so that they could start as late as 4pm rather than the appointed start time of 3pm. As it turned out, this concession was sufficient to allow all bar one of the competitors in the Masters to get to the board and start their game without losing time on their clock. Thankfully the venue hotel was unaffected by the raging storm and there were no power cuts or other service deficiencies.

To the play: last year's winner Hikaru Nakamura was content with a draw against Mikhail Antipov of Russia and he now shares the lead with David Howell of England. Nakamura's game was surprisingly anaemic, with the US player eschewing his usual sharp play and going for a sedate line of the Tarrasch French which made it relatively easy for Antipov to steer towards a draw.

David Howell looked anything but a winner for a goodly part of his game against Ivan Saric after spurning a draw by repetition on move 20. For one thing, his time situation was typically dire as he expended a lot of time on decisions in the middlegame, including 30 minutes on 15.Bc3 (from d2) and, having moved the bishop back to d2, another 25 minutes on the same move, Bc3, on move 19. Around move 35 his position started to look fishy but after the time control Saric suffered a massive oversight and the game was gone.

On the question of repeating moves, David Howell's comments to interviewer Tania Sachdev after the game were interesting. "We've seen a lot of top players do this [repeat twice and then play another move]. Why?" (Sachdev) "Apparently they're taught this in Russia, just to assert dominance and show who's in control. Any chance you get to repeat, just repeat twice – just don't do it the third time." (Howell)

Interviewer Tania Sachdev broached the ticklish subject of David Howell's perennial time problems. "A lot of viewers have commented on your time management. What's going on there?" "Never heard that one before," quipped the GM. More seriously: "it's bad. My New Year's resolution in 2018 was to be better with this, in life as well – never to be late, be more practical. But I've been late for every game, my clock-handling is worse than ever, so I'll have to deal with it. I hope my fans don't have a heart attack watching me."

Tradewise Gibraltar Masters, Round 7, 29.01.2018

D.Howell (2682) - I.Saric (2664)

1.Nf3 d5 2.g3 Bg4 3.Bg2 c6 4.0-0 e6 5.c4 Nf6 6.cxd5 Bxf3 7.Bxf3 cxd5 8.Nc3 Nc6 9.d4 Be7 10.e3 0-0 11.Bd2 Rc8 12.Rc1 Ne8 13.Ne2 Nd6 14.Nf4 Qb6 15.Bc3 Rfd8 16.a3 Nb5 17.Bd2 Bg5 18.Nd3 Nd6 19.Bc3 Note, White took an eye-watering 55 minutes on 15.Bc3 and 19.Bc3 combined. **19...Nb5 20.Bd2 Nd6 21.Rc2** White could

have repeated here with 21.Bc3, of course. "Why did you repeat positions?" "Partly it's to gain time on the clock and partly it's to show them who's in control," joked Howell. **21...h6 22.Kg2 Nc4 23.Bc1 a5 24.Rc3 Be7 25.Be2 Qa7 26.Qa4 Rb8 27.Qb5 Rdc8 28.Nc5 Bxc5 29.Qxc5 Qa8 30.Qb5 Na7 31.Qb3 b5 32.Qd1 a4 (diagram)**



I won't pretend I found the earlier part of the game particularly riveting. On the whole, I would prefer watching coastal erosion. Come to think of it, quite a lot of that was taking place outside the venue as this game was being played. But what was rather more exciting – nerve-wracking would perhaps be a better description – was watching David Howell's clock count down to a handful of seconds after each of these moves. Ivan Saric was relatively cushy with nine minutes or so in hand. **33.b3 b4** "I miscalculated his b4 break and was just holding on." (Howell) **34.axb4 Nb5 35.Rd3 a3!**? A very sharp piece sacrifice to secure a monster passed pawn. Not the sort of move that most of us would want to see played on the board with barely in excess of 30 seconds left to find a reply. But David copes with the emergency situation well. **36.bxc4 dxc4+ 37.Bf3 Qa6**

38.Rd2 a2 "Did that pawn on a2 worry you?" (interviewer Tania Sachdev) "I've had scarier positions." (Howell) **39.Bb2 c3 40.Rc2 cxb2 41.Rxb2 Nc3 42.Qa1** The time control has been reached and the players can relax a bit. Black has won back his piece but remains a pawn down. However, the monster pawn on a2 is worth a lot more. **42...Qa3?** It is curious how often players go wrong after a time scramble is over. This is a serious mistake. Black should play 42...Rc4 43.Rc1 Rcx b4! 44.Rxb4 Rxb4 when both captures on c3 would lead to an edge for Black, e.g. 45.Rxc3 (45.Qxc3 Rb1 46.Qc8+ Qxc8 47.Rxc8+ Kh7 48.Ra8 a1Q 49.Rxa1 Rxa1) 45...Rb1 46.Rc8+ Qxc8 47.Qxa2 Rc1 with winning chances. Howell was surprised at how quickly his opponent played this move, despite having plenty of time to think about it with the extra time added. "I'm a tricky guy. He should have realised I had this trick prepared for Rxa2." **43.Rc1! Rxb4??** Simply a blunder. There are a number of other safe alternatives, though White may be a bit better now. **44.Rxa2** David Howell thought his opponent must have overlooked this relatively simple move. **44...Qxa2 45.Qxa2 Nxa2 46.Rxc8+ Kh7 47.d5!** It wouldn't be so bad if Black had simply lost a pawn but his pieces are caught in a tangle and White can gain time to win a pawn or perhaps more. **47...exd5** Forced, otherwise the d-pawn will promote. **48.Rc2** 48.Bxd5 is also good enough. **48...Ra4 49.Bxd5 Nb4 50.Rc4 Ra5 51.Be4+ f5 52.Rxb4 fxe4 53.Rxe4 1-0**

Some of the tournament favourites are now moving into position to make a strike for the big prize. Both MVL and Aronian won their round seven games and are tucked in just behind the two leaders. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave beat Chanda Sandipan after Black went in for a slightly suspect line of the Modern/Caro-Kann where Black gives up a pawn for nebulous compensation. At one point Black had the chance to exchange into an opposite-coloured bishop endgame but, looking closer, it was probably lost anyway. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave's bishop got itself stuck in an awkward corner but the French super-GM was able to sacrifice it to create an unstoppable phalanx of passed pawns.

Aronian-Short featured an unusual opening which Aronian had played once before in a blitz game. At the completion of development Short went in for a piece for pawns sacrifice which tied up White's pieces but Aronian gradually unravelled and was able to realise his material advantage.

Tradewise Gibraltar Masters, Round 7, 29.01.2018

L.Aronian (2797) - N.Short

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 d6 3.Nf3 f5 4.g3 Nc6 Black nearly always prefers 4...Nf6 here. **5.d4 e4 6.d5 Ne5** 6...exf3 7.dxc6 bxc6 8.exf3 Nf6 9.Bg2 leads to a stable advantage for White, with pressure along the long diagonal and e-file. **7.Nxe5!?** Other games have featured 7.Nd4 but there is one previous Aronian game with the text move on the database, with which Black had no doubt familiarised himself. **7...dxe5 8.g4** Making a messy pawn structure even messier. **8...Bc5** 8...g6 9.gxf5 gxf5 10.Rg1 Nf6 11.Bg5 Be7 12.e3 Rg8 13.Rg3 Rg6 14.Be2 was the continuation in a blitz game between Aronian and Ivanchuk in Leuven last July, which White won in 27 moves. **9.Qb3!** This is also an engine first choice. For us lesser mortals it is very hard to understand why White should have played this (given that, at this level, the cheapo threat of Qb5+ and Qxc5 would be unlikely to work). But subsequent play give us a few clues. **9...Nf6** 9...a6 is possible here. Perhaps then 10.Na4 and White has the possibility of transferring the queen to g3 where it could support a pawn advance. **10.Qb5+ Nd7 11.h4** Evidently White wanted to get the h4 advance in without the nuisance of a black knight on f6 being able to capture the g-pawn. **11...a6 12.Qb3 e3** Black opts to cut the white position in half with this pawn sacrifice,

which is a common theme in a number of position. Instead Black would perhaps have liked to play 12...g6 but then 13.h5 would be a little awkward. That seems to be the gist of White's Qb3/h4 idea. **13.Bxe3 Bxe3 14.fxe3 fxg4 15.Ne4 Nf6 16.Bg2 0-0 17.c5 Kh8 18.0-0-0 (diagram)**



Both players have completed their development, more or less, and the position seems about equal. Black immediately embarks on a very ambitious plan. 18...Rb8 looks a safer option. **18...Bf5!? 19.Ng3 Bg6 20.h5 Nxf5** A bold piece sacrifice. 20...Bf7 21.h6 g6 (21...gxh6 is probably better) 22.Qxb7 Rb8 23.Qc6 and White is a safe pawn up. **21.Nxf5 Rf2 22.Bf1 Qf8** Black threatens to win the piece back with Bxh5 followed by Rxf1 so White has to surrender the c-pawn. **23.Ng3 Qxc5+ 24.Qc3 Qe7** Black has two pawns for the piece plus he has forced several of White's pieces into passive defence. White has to wriggle his way out of trouble. **25.e4 Qg5+ 26.Kb1 Qf4 27.Ka1 Rf8 28.Rg1 Rf7** 28...Bxe4 is tempting but it eases White's way back into the game: 29.e3 Qf3 30.Bd3 and now 30...Bxd5 31.Nh1! Rh2 32.Qxe5 when White is now firing on all cylinders. **29.e3 Qg5 30.Bc4 Rd7 31.Qb4 b5 32.Nf5** Threatening mate in one. **32...h5 33.Qe1 Rf3** 33...Rh2 34.Qg3 Bxf5 35.Qxh2 Bxe4 36.Bb3 is a computer suggestion but it looks too optimistic for Black. **34.Be2 Rh3 35.Bf1 Bxf5** 35...Rh2 36.Qg3 Rc2 37.Bd3 Rc5 chases the c5 rook to a square where it has no bearing on the game, allowing White to win as he pleases. **36.Bxh3 Bxe4 37.Bg2 Bxg2 38.Rxg2 h4** A final error, losing a kingside pawn but 38...Kh7 would only prolong the agony. **39.Qb4 1-0** 39...g3 40.Rh1 Rxd5 41.Qxh4+ Qxh4 42.Rxh4+ Kg8 43.Rh1 is an easy win.

Wang Hao decided to take a half-point bye in this round (the last in which it is possible). If he did it in the hope of doing some tourism, he would have been well and truly stymied by the inclement weather but it would have provided him some respite from the metaphorical storm in the tournament hall. Personally I am strongly opposed to professional players being allowed a bye other than in the first two or three rounds of a tournament, but that is just my personal view and of course I can have nothing against individual players who choose to take advantage of this rule.

Pentala Harikrishna's chances of winning the tournament were dashed by his loss to Grigoriy Oparin. This was a fascinating struggle which turned on Oparin's decision to take what looked like a hot pawn on c2 on move 36. This allowed Harikrishna to win Oparin's queen for rook and bishop, but Oparin also gained a dangerous passed a-pawn. It turned out that the c2-pawn was so not so "hot" after all, and its capture was extremely fine judgment by the Russian GM. Well worth readers looking at this game as it shows how rook and bishop can sometimes outgun a queen.

Three more players reached 5½, namely Richard Rapport, Jules Moussard and Daniil Dubov. Moussard is a new name for many of us but he thoroughly outplayed former Gibraltar Masters winner Ivan Cheparinov and seems a fine prospect for French chess. Rapport and Dubov also seem to be running into form at the right moment, beating Huzman and Henderson respectively.

Leading contender for the top women's prize Ju Wenjun gave her rivals a chance to catch up with her in this round when she took a bye to reach 5 points. Only one of the women players was able to take advantage, namely Kateryna Lagno who beat David Martin Martinez to equal Ju Wenjun's score. Lie Tingjie also took a bye and is on 4½. Nino Batsiashvili, Pia Cramling, Anna Muzychuk and Anastasya Paramzina all drew, and Aleksandra Goryachkina won, to reach 4½. Mariya Muzychuk lost to Vassily Ivanchuk, who is typically unpredictable in form, but on an upswing in round seven.

Prodigy-watch: Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa beat GN Gopal, a formidable and highly-rated opponent who has often performed well in Gibraltar. There was something inexorable about the way the 12-year-old patiently prepared and executed a kingside attack, after the first time control, and there was seemingly nothing his highly experienced opponent could do about it. It was one more shining example of this gifted boy's ability, reminiscent of the way Carlsen played at a similar age. He now has 5/7 and remains unbeaten in the tournament. A GM norm is certainly a possibility. Nihal Sarin is half a point behind him on 4½ but he too has now won two games in a row. In round seven he beat the German IM Vincent Keymer. In round eight he has been paired to play former Gibraltar Masters winner Kiril Georgiev, his first GM opponent of the tournament, so it will be interesting to see how he fares.

Scores after round 7: 1-2 Nakamura (USA), Howell 6/7, 3-10 Aronian (Armenia), Antipov, Oparin, Dubov (Russia), Vachier-Lagrave, Moussard (France), Rapport (Hungary), Wang Hao (China, who took a bye in round seven) 5½. Leading women's score: Kateryna Lagno (Russia), Ju Wenjun (China) 5 (after taking a half-point bye in this round).

Looking ahead: with three rounds to go we can probably expect one of the ten players named above to be the ultimate winner but should bear in mind that it is not unprecedented for a player with a score of 5/7 to win the tournament. Nakamura did just that in 2016, winning his final three games and then beating MVL in a tie-break match. So there is still all to play for.

A selection of photos from round seven 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

Official website: www.gibchess.com
[YouTube Channel](#)

John Saunders

Press Reporter, Tradewise Gibraltar Chess Festival

Official website: www.gibchess.com - *Twitter* @GibraltarChess, *official hashtag* #GibChess

Personal Twitter Account @johnchess