



GIBRALTAR INTERNATIONAL CHESS FESTIVAL

Monday 21 January - Thursday 31 January 2019

2019 Gibraltar Masters: Round 3 – 24 January

Slaughterhouse-Five

John Saunders reports: After the third round of the 2019 Gibraltar Masters, played on 24 January at the Caleta Hotel, we are now down to five players on the maximum score, only one of whom could be regarded as a member of the elite group from whom the winner would be expected to come. The five who have emerged from the mayhem are David Navara (Czech Republic), Bogdan-Daniel Deac (Romania), Gabor Papp (Hungary), Rinat Jumabayev (Kazakhstan) and the de facto leader in the hunt for the women's first prize, Sarasadat Khademalsharieh (Iran), who is 94th in the tournament ranking.

The top of the results list for round three has a curious aspect. There was just one decisive result on the top 12 boards, which was reminiscent of (if not quite identical to) the results of the recent Carlsen-Caruana match. The next 14 boards were the opposite of that match – 14 straight decisive results. Weird – how is it to be explained? The cut-over from defensive supremacy appears to occur when the higher rated player weighs in around the 2640s, or maybe it is when the lower rated player reaches 2480. Well, OK, not a representative sample but at least it's a reminder that open tournaments have an advantage over small-scale closed events as far as the spectators are concerned; when the top guys don't deliver decisive results, you only have to dig down to the lower boards to enjoy the chess equivalent of goal-mouth action.

David Navara played this bright and breezy game to defeat the strong Israeli grandmaster Victor Mikhalevski.



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David Navara (left) overcame Victor Mikhalevski's Grünfeld Defence

Round 3: David Navara (2738) - Victor Mikhalevski

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Qb3 dxc4 6.Qxc4 0-0 7.e4 a6 8.Be2 b5 9.Qb3 c5 This is all book. Black gives up the c-pawn in return for the weak e4-pawn. **10.dxc5 Bb7 11.e5 Nfd7 12.Be3 e6 13.0-0 Nc6** Unusual, though not unprecedented. The immediate 13...Qc7 has been played more often. **14.Rad1 Qc7 15.a4** 15.Bxb5!? has been tried here: 15...axb5 16.Nxb5 Qd8 looks tricky for Black but with best play he should emerge to enjoy his material advantage. **15...b4** The result of this game may lead theorists to examine the merits of 15...bxa4 instead. **16.Ne4 Ncxe5 17.Nxe5 Nxe5?** 17...Bxe5 is definitely better. It doesn't prevent 18.Nd6 but after 18...Bd5 19.Rxd5 (The exchange sacrifice is forced: 19.Qxb4 Rab8 and the c5-pawn drops)

19...exd5 20.Qxd5 Black can be rid of the annoying d6-knight with 20...Bxd6 21.Qxd6 when White has enough for the exchange for pawn sacrifice but Black is still in the game. **18.Nd6 Bc6** 18...Bd5 19.Rxd5 exd5 20.Qxd5 gives White a much better version of the exchange sacrifice given in the previous note. The knight on d6 cannot easily be exchanged off and dominates the position. **19.Bd4 Qa5** Threatening the skewer on a4 is tempting but in fact this just loses valuable time. Better 19...Bd5 20.Qe3 Nd7 21.Bxg7 Kxg7 though Black is still struggling. **20.Qe3 Nd7 21.Nc4 Qc7 22.Bxg7 Kxg7 23.Nb6 Nxb6 24.cxb6**



A strange position. It's not often you see doubled pawns with an enemy pawn separating them. Aesthetics aside, the position now greatly favours White, with his control of the d-file and dark square complex. **24...Qb7 25.Rd6!** Now Black can't challenge on the d-file with a rook as White has Qd4+ followed by Rxd8. **25...a5** White is relaxed about 25...Bxg2, not for any tactical reason but because, after, for example 26.Rc1 Qe4 27.a5 Qxe3 28.fxe3 Be4 29.Rc7 Kf6, White has a huge positional plus despite being a nominal pawn down. At one time analysis engines were notoriously materialistic but Stockfish 10 assesses this as a huge +6 advantage to White. **26.Rc1 Rfc8 27.h4 Bxg2** 27...Bd5 28.Rxc8 Rxc8 29.h5 is no better. **28.Qd4+ e5** 28...Kg8 29.Rc7 Qe4 30.b7 wins. **29.Qxe5+ Kg8 30.Rc7 Qe4 31.Qxe4 Bxe4 32.f3 1-0** If the bishop leaves the a8-h1 diagonal, 33.b7 wins and it has no good square on the diagonal.

Wesley So was comfortably held by 21-year-old German GM Rasmus Svane. Le Quang Liem was lucky to escape with half a point as another 21-year-old, Indian GM Suri Vaibhav held what looked like a winning advantage for much of their game. Peralta-Artemiev was a complex-looking Grünfeld, but probably an opening laboratory battle. Women's world champion Ju Wenjun looked under some pressure from Ivan Cheparinov (who is now registered for Georgia) but the former Gibraltar titlist couldn't find a way to exploit his positional pressure. Gawain Jones's game with Spanish GM Renier Vazquez Igarza came down to a tricky little rook endgame but it panned out to a draw with accurate play on both sides. Croatian GM Ivan Saric exited theory on move 13, but his divergence didn't achieve anything special against a resilient Kateryna Lagno.

Iranian IM Sarasadat Khademalsharieh played one of the most striking games of the day in defeating Alexander Donchenko. The 20-year-old German GM's Benoni was given the full treatment after his rook was misplaced on c7. I have decided to award her the greatest honour I can bestow – a place in my MS Word auto-correct dictionary alongside Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa as a player with a long, hard-to-spell name which I am likely to need to type many times in the future.



Sarasadat Khademalsharieh is interviewed after her win against Alexander Donchenko

Sarasadat Khademalsharieh (2468) - Alexander Donchenko (2604)



Position after 23...h6

Black is in dire straits here, mainly because he misplaced his rook on c7 a couple of moves previously. **24.Bh4** Stockfish 10 finds a tactical shot: 24.Bxf6! Bxf6 (24...Qxf6 is no better) 25.f4 Nd7 26.e5 Bg7 (26...dxe5 27.Ne4) 27.Nc4, etc. **24...c4?!** The main alternative was 24...g5 25.Bg3 Nh5 26.Bh2 Nf4 which is better than throwing the c-pawn on the fire, though White is still better. **25.Ra4 Ned7 26.Nxc4 Rec8** 26...Ne5 27.Ne3 Rcc8 28.Qe2 **27.Nb6 Nxb6 28.axb6 Rc5 29.f4 Re8??** Black probably had to play 29...Qe8 when his position isn't great but the text move loses outright. **30.e5! dxe5 31.fxe5 Qxe5 32.Bxf6 Bxf6 33.Qf2** Forking the loose rook and the inadequately defended bishop. **33...Bg5 34.Re4 34.Qxf7+ Kh8 35.Re4** gets the job done quicker. **34...Be3 35.Qxe3 Rxc3 36.Qf2 Qxe4 37.Qxf7+ Kh8 38.bxc3 Re7 39.Qf8+ Kh7 40.Rf7+ Rxf7 41.Qxf7+ Kh8 42.d6 Qe1+ 43.Qf1 Qxc3 44.Qf8+ Kh7 45.Qe7+ Kg8 46.Qd8+ 1-0**

As for her illustrious colleague in my auto-correct dictionary: Maxime Vachier-Lagrave brought to an end the fine run of the Nigerian player Kolade Onabogun who had been such a brave GM-slayer in the first two rounds. Kolade put up a stubborn resistance and deserves at the very least to have his picture in this report.



Pride of Nigerian chess, Kolade Onabogun – GM slayer

Report Ends

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