



GIBRALTAR

INTERNATIONAL CHESS FESTIVAL

Monday 21 January - Thursday 31 January 2019

2019 Gibraltar Masters: Round 4 – 24 January

The David and Sara Show

John Saunders reports: A sole leader emerged from round four of the 2019 Gibraltar Masters, played on 25 January at the Caleta Hotel. David Navara (Czech Republic) now stands proudly at the top of the list after defeating Bogdan-Daniel Deac (Romania) with the black pieces and proceeding to 4/4. Nine players are on 3½/4: Wesley So (USA), Nils Grandelius (Sweden), Arkadij Naiditsch (Azerbaijan), Gabor Papp (Hungary), Rinat Jumabayev (Kazakhstan), Michael Adams (England), Baskaran Adhiban (India), Barathakoti Harshan (India) and Sarasadat Khadomalsharieh (Iran), who is the lowest rated of the nine and who leads the hunt for the lucrative women's first prize.

In yesterday's report I presented David Navara's and Sarasadat Khadomalsharieh's wins from round three. Looking through the games played in round four, I'm half-tempted to do the same again. It's started to become the David and Sara show. But perhaps not: both games were somewhat technical in nature. David Navara's chess runs contrary to his own seraphic nature: he harried and bullied his opponent into submission with a series of thrusts and blows all over the board, which is something that David the man (rather than the chess player) would never do to a living soul. One hundred per cent of David's aggression is channelled into his chess moves, leaving nothing behind but serenity.



Bogdan-Daniel Deac (left) found David Navara in relentless mood

Much the same seems to be true of Sara (I hope I can refer to her by that shortening of her name): she is a formidable opponent at the board but a delightful and bubbly personality away from it. In today's game, though, she faced the might of Levon Aronian. The great Armenian seemed to be gradually imposing himself on the game and consolidating his extra pawn when he made an uncharacteristic mistake which lost the pawn back and obliged him to seek a perpetual check. Nevertheless, a great effort from Sara as you could argue that Levon's mistake was born of pressure brought about by her tenacious defence.



A slip by Levon Aronian let Sarasadat Khademalsharieh in for a draw

The game between Daniele Vocaturo and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave was a Najdorf Sicilian and developed into a complex struggle. Stockfish 10 opined that the Italian GM might have secured a +1.49 advantage had he opted for 33.Qc2 but I'm wondering whether the analysis supporting this idea might not be fit for human cogitation, and certainly not with the clock ticking. Having held a possible edge (at least in the virtual eyes of the computer), Vocaturo suddenly found himself under pressure but he defended adequately to a level position at the time control.

Another game which exploded like a shooting star and then fizzled out into a draw was the one between Gawain Jones and Alejandro Ramirez. It started with an innocuous-looking Exchange French but Gawain was in a playful mood, feigning as if to fianchetto his kingside bishop and then locating it elsewhere, and then lurching towards the enemy king with a knight, sacrificing the light-squared bishop altogether. This required the most precise of defences but Alejandro proved up to the task. Commentators Simon Williams and Jovi Houska were full of praise for the imagination and enterprise shown in this game. It's a good example of a draw with far more spectator appeal than many a mundane decisive game.

Round 4: Gawain Jones (2691) - Alejandro Ramirez

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Nf3 Ngf6 6.Nxf6+ Nxf6 7.g3 This is a relatively new idea to try and breath life into a somewhat unpromising position. Gawain has played it a few times before, and it has also been tried by Vachier-Lagrave, Vallejo Pons, Svidler and Nepomniachtchi. **7...b6 8.Bb5+** Following the old chess adage "having played A, you must play B" one would expect to see 8.Bg2 here, which has been played by Anand amongst others, but in the last year or so White has opted for the text, perhaps because silicon recommends it. **8...Bd7 9.a4 a6 10.Be2 Bc6 11.0-0 Nd7** A new move from Black: 11...Bd6 was played in Jones-Hawkins, British Championship 2018 and was won by White. Black wants to guard against the knight settling on e5. **12.Bc4!** If you didn't know the identity and strength of the player playing White, you might be tempted to think him a bit of a patzer for moving his light-squared bishop three times in the space of his first 12 moves. Just imagine what Fred Reinfeld would have said. However, Gawain is planning something with a bit of spice which would have accounted for most of us and is only resisted by the most precise play. **12...Be7 13.d5 exd5 14.Nd4** For the second time in the game, Gawain plays A but doesn't follow up with B. If he time-travelled back a century, you could imagine Tarrasch being snooty about his style: "Herr Jones goes his own way in the opening, not one to be recommended to the general public", etc, etc. **14...Bb7 15.Nf5!?** White decides to go for it. Silicon is also in favour of this move, assessing the prospects as about equal. **15...dxc4** And Black decides to go for it, too. The alternative is 15...Bf6 when Black can reply to 16.Re1+ with 16...Ne5 and then 17.Bxd5 Bxd5 18.Bf4, etc, which seems to pan out roughly equal. **16.Nxg7+ Kf8 17.Bh6 Kg8** Looks forced but the computer finds the remarkable alternative 17...Ne5! when 18.Ne6+ Ke8 19.Nxd8 Nf3+ 20.Kh1 Rxd8 21.Qc1 and, despite having only two minor pieces for the queen, Black maintains the terrifying threat of discovered check on the long diagonal, with the possibility of Rd5-h5 and mate on h2. However, only the bravest of humans would walk down that road. **18.Re1** White could have taken an instant draw with 18.Ne6 fxe6 19.Qg4+ Kf7 20.Qh5+ Kg8 21.Qg4+ perpetual check, but he plays for the win and sets Black his first real test. **18...Bf8!** Probably best, though 18...Nf6 19.Qxd8+ Bxd8 20.Re5 Bc6 21.Rae1 Ne4! is hard to break down. **19.Re8** 19.Qg4? doesn't work: 19...Nf6 20.Qg5 Nd5 21.Qg4 Qf6, etc. **19...Qf6 20.Qxd7**



20...Rxe8 20...Qf3 21.Kf1 Qh1+ 22.Ke2 and Black has to opt for perpetual check rather than grab the rook, when he gets mated; **20...Qxh6 21.Nf5 Qh5 22.Ne7+ Kg7 23.Nf5+** is another draw since Black can't risk **23...Kg6 24.Re6+! fxe6 25.Qxe6+ Kg5 26.f4+** and mates. **21.Nxe8 Qxh6 22.Qg4+ Qg6** Black settles for the draw. The alternative was **22...Bg7 23.Rd1 Qg6 24.Rd8! Bxb2** and the game continues. Stockfish 10 assesses this as close to winning for Black but in real life it's very tricky. White's pieces are very active while Black's rook remains holed up in the corner and can't influence the game. **23.Nf6+ Kg7 24.Ne8+ Kg8 24...Kh6? 25.Qh4+ Qh5 26.Qf6+ Qg6 27.Qxh8** when Black attempts to mount a counterattack along the long diagonal can all be defused by White, leaving him with a won game. **25.Nf6+ Kg7 26.Ne8+ Kg8 27.Nf6+ Kg7 ½-½**

There were some other fascinating battles between elite players and leading female competitors. Kateryna Lagno has been in very good form recently but she was up against former world number four Mickey Adams in his best grinding form. Most of the pieces were hoovered off in double quick time, but Adams was able to outplay his opponent, but only as far as reaching an opposite-colours bishop endgame in which he had an extra pawn. You would have bet on a draw since Adams didn't even have a passed pawn but he managed to engineer two connected passed pawns. Even so the position was probably a theoretical draw but it proved beyond Kateryna's capabilities to hold it.



Mickey Adams was on his best grinding form against Kateryna Lagno

Mariya Muzychuk didn't seem to have any problems in drawing against 2690-rated Ivan Saric of Croatia. Nigel Short played a powerful-looking exchange for pawn sacrifice against Humpy Koneru but, despite shedding a second pawn, the Indian grandmaster defended resourcefully and came close to turning the tables before the game ended in a draw.

Perhaps the most gripping of the various battles of the sexes (which whets the appetite for the traditional match of that name taking place on Saturday night) was Ju Wenjun versus Vassily Ivanchuk. This was another long grind, with the difference that it was the female star going for the win after an inaccuracy from Chucky towards the end of the first time control had allowed the women's world champion to annex a pawn. Though she fought long and hard, the Chinese player was unable to convert her material advantage against the Ukrainian's typical endgame artistry. But it was a worthy struggle.



Ju Wenjun had an extra pawn but she couldn't make it tell against Ivanchuk

Report Ends

Author: John Saunders (@johnchess)

Press Reporter, 2019 Gibraltar International Chess Festival

Email gibchesspress@gmail.com

Festival Twitter stream @GibraltarChess, official hashtag #GibChess

Photos by official tournament photographers David Llada, John Saunders and Niki Riga for use by press outlets are available here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/146512690@N06/albums>

Official website: www.gibchess.com

[YouTube Channel](#)

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/GibraltarChess/>