

No castling, please – we're British

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rokirovka = the Russian for castling

This week at the London Chess Classic, the world was turned upside down. Magnus Carlsen was knocked out, Ding Liren won the Grand Chess Tour, and American actor Woody Harrelson beat tournament director Malcolm Pein in a five-minute game.

OK, one of those three statements was maybe a little bit of a porky. But Woody almost beat Malcolm, according to commentator Maurice Ashley...

The Hollywood star popped into the Olympia Conference Centre to make the ceremonial first move for Magnus Carlsen vs. Lev Aronian – and for once managed to keep to the script. Magnus asked for 1. d4, and got it. (Last year, in Game 1 of the World Championship match, Fabiano Caruana asked Harrelson to play 1. e4. He played 1. d4, then playfully tipped over Fabi's king. The little tinker!)

The other major upset was the decision to change the rules of chess – to ban castling. (In a two-game exhibition match between the 3rd and 4th place players in the British Knockout Championship, anyway).

Yep, 500 years of Ruy Lopez, QGD & Sicilian Dragon theory down the drain. But maybe 1 g4 will now make a comeback? We feel the mysterious hand of the Grobmeister of Chessington, Mike Basman, at work somewhere...

As it happened, the No-Castling mini-match ended with honours even to Gawain Jones and Luke McShane. But at least the London System seems to score zero percent in No-Castling chess, based on this extensive (AlphaZero-like) research.

So, will No-Castling emerge as the hot new chess variant everyone is talking about? Well, according to my information – based on many years of teaching primary school kids – Vladimir Kramnik, the London Classic and FIDE are actually a long way behind on this one.

I can now exclusively reveal that in junior chess clubs and Chess in Schools and Communities Year 4 classes up and down the UK, a secret

training programme has been underway for years, refining the latest nuances in No-Castling theory.

Never mind the Artificial Intelligence, Vlad, we've crowd-sourced the answer already.

Particularly among the Key Stage 2 crowd, our research has found – contrary to Alpha Zero's self-play games – statistically, the largest percentage of No-Castling chess games ends with... 4 Qxf7 mate.

We think Kramnik should be told. This vital new discovery could alter the whole way we think about chess.

But there is more good news. A little bird tells me that, at next year's French Championship, any playoff will have to include No-En Passant chess – and a Spanish variation on this variant, ¡No pasarán! Chess, will not allow either side to cross the fifth rank.

But from Russia, there are sinister rumblings that No-Castling Chess may be banned altogether. This is because, of course, Vladimir Putin may want to castle for a third (and maybe a fourth) time with his long-serving current prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev...

As ever, we shall endeavour to keep you abreast of all the latest developments here, via the ECF Newsletter.

And meanwhile, kids, don't listen to that bad Mr. Kramnik fellow. Please do keep castling! (Life is hard enough for chess teachers, you know.)