

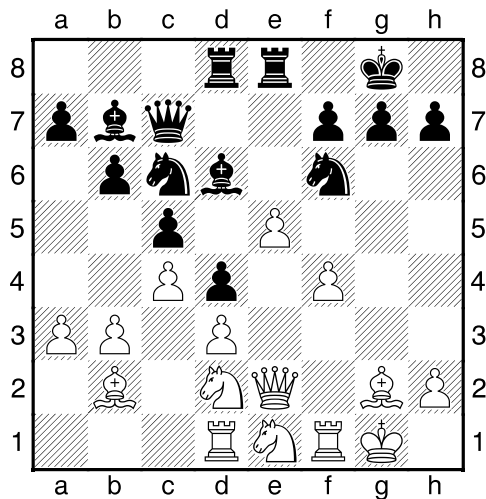
In my capacity as Director of International Chess of the English Chess Federation, I've been very keen to ensure that our leading young players had the chance to play as soon as the lifting of restrictions allowed.

As such, I organised a Hybrid chess qualifier for the FIDE World Cup at the Hilton Hotel in Elstree in late May. This multi-country and multi-venue event was staged by the European Chess Union and qualified 36 players for the first stage of the world chess championship cycle which began just inland from Sochi last month. Hybrid events require each player to have access to a computer screen and an actual chess set and board. These were supplied by Chess & Bridge and I was especially grateful to arbiters Shohreh Bayat and Alex MacFarlane for ensuring everything ran smoothly.

GM Simon Williams, IM Andrew Horton, IM Ameet Ghasi, IM Ravi Haria and FM Marcus Harvey were all outrated by their GM opponents in the first round of the Elstree Qualifier. Harvey scored a fine win over Croatian chess legend Zdenko Kozul, but was outplayed in the tie-break. Only Haria, who defeated German GM Falko Bindrich 2-0, made it to the second round, before losing to the Russian GM Ernesto Inarkiev. Haria won the first game with this spectacular rook sacrifice.

F.Bindrich-R.Hari

European Hybrid Qualifier 2021



18...Nxe5!! 19 fxe5 Rxe5

Just look at Black's bishops and attacking power! He clearly has far too much for the piece.

20 Ne4 Nxe4 21 Bxe4

21 dxe4 Rde8 22 Bc1 Rxe4! 23 Bxe4 Rxe4 24 Qh5 g6 25 Qh3 h5! (Haria) simply leaves White completely undone on the light squares.

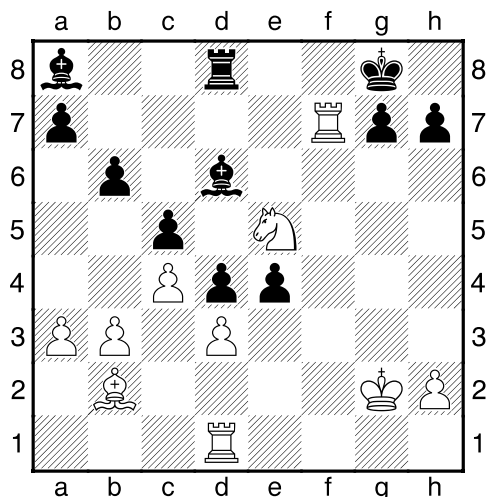
21...Qe7?

Natural, but 21...Rde8 was the way to go, and if 22 Nf3 Rxe4! 23 dxe4 Rxe4 24 Qg2 Qd7! when the attack is just too strong.

22 Nf3 f5 23 Nxe5 fxe4 24 Rf7?

Far too optimistic, especially when White had available 24 Nf7 e3 25 Qg4 e2 26 Nh6+ Kh8 27 Nf7+ Kg8=.

24...Qg5+ 25 Qg2 Qxg2+ 26 Kxg2 Ba8



White's pieces are loose and Black's bishops and e-pawn absolute monsters.

27 Rf5

27 Rd7 Rxd7 28 Nxd7 e3+ 29 Kg1 Bf3! 30 Rc1 Bg4 (Haria) picks up the knight and the game.

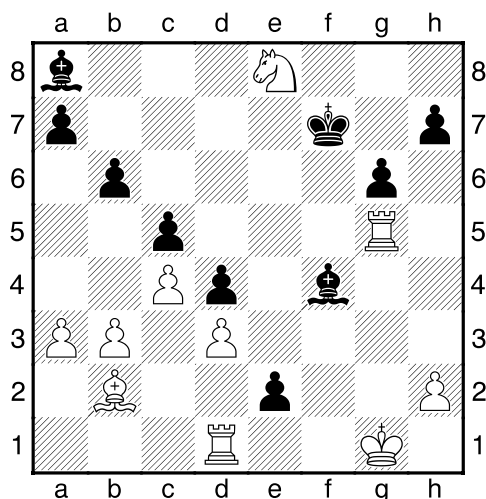
27...g6 28 Rg5

28 Nf7 e3+ is very dangerous for White, but probably had to be tried. Black should be winning after 29 Kh3 gxf5 30 Nxd8 f4 or 29 Kg1 gxf5 30 Nxd8 f4 31 Ne6 f3.

28...e3+ 29 Kg1 Re8! 30 Ng4?

30 Nxc6 hxc6 31 Rxc6+ was the last try.

30...Bf4 31 Nf6+ Kf7 32 Nxe8 e2!



Fittingly the pawn has the last laugh. White might have two extra rooks, but there's just no defence.

33 Rf1 exf1Q+ 34 Kxf1 Bxg5 35 Nc7 Bc6 36 Nb5 a6 0-1

Ravi then agreed to travel to Russia for the FIDE World Cup, the only English player to do so. He memorably outplayed the experienced Russian GM Vadim Zvjaginsev to deservedly make it through to the second round of the World Cup. He then faced a formidable obstacle

in the shape of Etienne Bacrot, the famous French former prodigy and still a very strong grandmaster, rated 2673. Bacrot took the first game, but Haria won the return on demand and as Black, despite his opponent plumping for the Exchange variation of the French and outplaying his opponent even in a highly simplified position. Shades of Gurevich – Short, Manila 1990. Unfortunately, Bacrot made no mistake come the tie-break, preferring 3 Nc3 en route to winning that 1.5-0.5.

Back to the Board

It's been great this month to see not just the return of Adam Raoof's famous Golders Green Rapidplay, but also his staging an IM norm all-play-all in Muswell Hill, North London, which was supported by Ben Software Ltd and the Friends of Chess Charity. Two IM norms were made, but not by English players.

Stafford Success

Like many, Wood Green captain Lawrence Cooper was frustrated by the curtailment of the 2019/20 4NCL season when several of his players were on for norms after six rounds. Rather than sulk and think what might have been, Lawrence channelled his energies into a positive direction, staging a GM and IM norm tournament in Stafford. I was pleased to be able to invest some ECF funds into such a venture, I wish we could have done more, with support also coming from the Friends of Chess, the John Robinson Trust and Lawrence himself, while arbiters Matt Carr and Aga Milewska looked after everything very well from what I could see when I dropped by one day. Aga also secured her final norm for the FIDE Arbiter title.

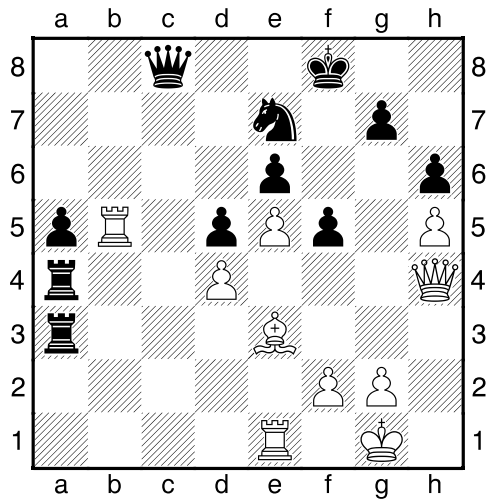
The playing conditions were excellent and the tournament was held in the historic Oddfellows Hall, right in the heart of Stafford. If chess is to keep catching the public's imagination, holding tournaments on main shopping streets can do no harm. While I was delighted to see 63-year-old GM Mark Hebden in fine form, I was naturally rooting for our young stars and, boy, did they deliver.

Ravi Haria continued his 2600-level form from the World Cup as he raced away to 5/5, defeating Jonathan Blackburn, Jonah Willow, David Fitzsimons, Tamas Fodor and Borna Derakhshani. He also overcame IM Andrew Greet, while quick draws with Hebden and Matthew Turner took him to the key score of 7 points – and with a round to spare!

Haria now has two GM norms and finished on 7.5/9, a point ahead of Hungarian GM Tamas Fodor, with Hebden and Marcus Harvey sharing third, both undefeated on 6/9. For Harvey this was an especially good result, not least when you consider he needed only 5.5 points for an IM norm. Having been an FM for what feels like absolutely ages, Marcus will now finally become an IM.

R.Haria-A.Greet

Wood Green Invitational, Stafford 2021



37 Bxh6!! gxh6

There is nothing better, if 37...Ng8 38 Bd2 followed by h5-h6.

38 Qf6+ Ke8 39 Rb8 Qxb8 40 Qh8+ Kf7 41 Qxb8 Ra1 42 Rxa1 Rxa1+ 43 Kh2 a4 44 Qh8 Rd1

Or 44...a3 45 Qh8+ Ke8 46 Qxe6 a2 47 Qa6, intending Qb5+ and Qb2.

45 Qf6+ Ke8 46 Qxe6 Rxd4 47 Qxh6 Rh4+ 48 Kg1 a3 49 e6 Rg4 50 Qf6 Rg8 51 h6 1-0