

Scottish Chess

Issue 310

February 2024

A group of people are seated at a long wooden table in a restaurant. The table is set with plates of food, glasses, and bottles. The restaurant has a modern, industrial feel with exposed wooden beams and hanging pendant lights. In the background, other diners and a bar area are visible.

**4NCL Division 1 on the
menu for Team ALBA**

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19

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— 2023 —

10 apps for playing, learning,
analyzing and more.



The Magazine of
Chess Scotland

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Issue 310 February 2024

Thanks to: Hamish Olson, Alastair Dawson,
Ian Marks, IM Douglas Bryson

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pressed in this magazine are not necesari-
ly those of Chess Scotland.

Cover photo: Team ALBA celebrate a
stirring start to their 2023/24 4NCL cam-
paign.

Welcome! February 2024

A warm welcome to read-
ers now that it is 2024 and
I hope this finds you all
well and working hard at
your chess – or at least
enjoying it!

This month sees the focus
on team ALBA who have
proved themselves wor-
thy of a spot in the 4NCL
top division.

I am hopeful of covering
the SNCL in similar fash-
ion, but to do so it would
be very helpful if readers
send in some games!

Team re-
ports are
also very
wel-
come—if
your team



is doing well then share it
with the rest of us.

As always, feedback on
the magazine is most wel-
come—if there is some-
thing you’d like to see
covered let me know.

All the best,

Andrew Burnett *Editor*

Contents

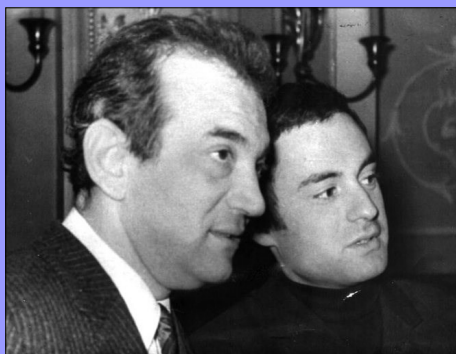
The big question as Team
ALBA kicked off another
stint in the top division of
the 4NCL, Britain’s premier
team competition, was
whether captain Neil Berry
could convince his troops
they were worthy of their
place. Six rounds in and the
answer has been well and
truly given! Read all about
it...





What could possibly have sparked the ire of Alastair Dawson (left) on the annual Scottish players pilgrimage to Benidorm? Read all about rating problems, missing prizes, and 100+ move games in this warts-and-all report!

You may recognise the man on the left, but what about his colleague on the right? Ian Marks explores *The Essential Sosonko*, a massive tome of the Dutch GM's writings.



ALBA Thrive as 4NCL Battle Heats Up!



Last season's promotion back to Division 1 brought with it a keen knowledge that staying in the top echelon of the 4NCL would require commitment, excellent play and a little luck.

More than halfway through the 2023/24 season now, Team ALBA have ticked all those boxes and currently sit in the top half of the division, a fantastic achievement – although it's still a little early to celebrate.

Still, there have been plenty of games worthy of discussion and over the next few pages you can enjoy the ALBA adventures so far. I am indebted to Hamish Olson for annotating two of his games and I have attempted to pick out the most entertaining and interesting of the other battles...

		Alba		2256	Celtic Tigers 1		2233	
161	w	Waldhausen Gordon, Frederick	f	2344	½ - ½	Kilpatrick, Callum	i	2430 e
162	b	Olson, Hamish	f	2335	½ - ½	Gallana, Marco		2284
163	w	Berry, Neil	f	2255	1 - 0	Zulfic, Fedja		2223 e
164	b	Gourlay, Iain	f	2298	1 - 0	Quinn, John M		2171 e
165	w	McKay, Roderick M	i	2189	½ - ½	Pedersen, Carsten		2186 e
166	b	Shafi, Declan		2194	0 - 1	Pein, Jonathan	f	2261
167	w	Swanson, Stephen		2179	½ - ½	Duessler, Stefanie	w	2080
168	b	Lampard, Alice	w	1746	½ - ½	Franco, Gaston		2034
					4½ - 3½			

Round 1

Things got off to a great start back in November with a narrow victory over a similarly-solid Celtic Tigers 1 team in the closest thing we have to a 'derby' match.

Notable was Freddy Waldhausen Gordon's board 1 debut for ALBA while team captain Neil Berry's hugely important win made it all the way to Malcom Pein's *Daily Telegraph* chess column...

(Notes by Malcolm Pein)

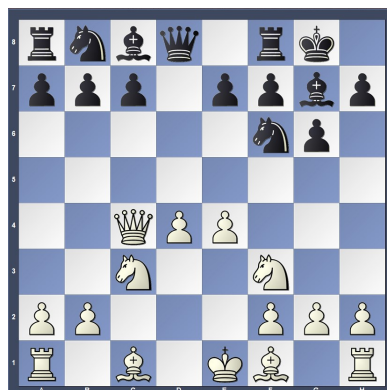
It's never easy for White to keep control against the Grunfeld Defence but Scottish FM Neil Berry did it well as he gave something of a Masterclass in the Russian system with 5.Qb3.

♣ Berry, Neil (2255)

♣ Zulfic, Fedja (2223)

4NCL Division One

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4. ♘f3 ♙g7 5.♙b3 dxc4 6.♙xc4 0-0 7.e4



7...♘c6

7...a6 is a sharp alternative planning queenside expansion.

8. ♖b3 b5 9. e5 ♘fd7 10. e6 was **16... ♖fe8?**
Bronstein-Pein Wrexham 1995.

8. ♖e2 ♖g4 9. d5!

Seizing space, and now Black, equally thematically, aims for activity and counterplay against b2.

9... ♘a5 10. ♖b4 ♘xf3 11. ♘xf3 c6 12. 0-0 ♖b6 13. ♖a4!

13. ♖xe7 ♘c4 gives Black sufficient counterplay against b2.

13... ♘d7 14. ♖d1 ♘c5 15. ♖c2 ♖b4?!

Overly ambitious, although, even after 15... ♘c4 16. ♖b1 White's two bishops give him the edge.

16. ♘g5



16... ♘c4! was playable after 17. ♖ab1 (17. ♘xe7 ♘xb2 18. ♘xc5 ♖xc5 19. ♖xb2 ♘xc3) 17... ♖fe8.

17. ♖ac1 ♖ac8?!

Slow, although even 17... ♘c4 18. ♘b1! leaves Black in trouble.

18. b3!



Berry has fully neutralised Black's play and threatens Bd2.

18... ♘d7 19. dxc6?

19. ♘b1! and 19. ♘g4 cxd5 20. ♘xd7 ♖xc3 21. ♘d2! were both very strong.

19... ♖xc6?

19...♘xc6! 20.♖xd7 ♘e5 keeps Black on the board.

How did White now win material?

20.e5! ♖c7 21.e6!?

23.♘d5! exd5 24.♖xc7 e6?
25.♖xg7+

Strong, but the computer prefers 21.♔e2! then e6, or if 21... ♖xc3 22.♘d2

1-0

21...fxe6? 22.♔e2 ♘e5



Neil Berry - Team ALBA captain

Round 2

	Wood Green Youth				Alba			
141	w	Willow, Jonah B	i	2362				2256
142	b	Royal, Shreyas	i	2404	1 - 0	Waldhausen Gordon, Frederick	f	2344
143	w	Bazakutsa, Svyatoslav	f	2350 e	1 - 0	Berry, Neil	f	2255
144	b	Derakhshani, Borna	f	2370	1/2 - 1/2	Gourlay, Iain	f	2298
145	w	Czopor, Maciej	f	2354	1 - 0	McKay, Roderick M	i	2189
146	b	Durak, Can	f	2310	1 - 0	Shafi, Declan		2194
147	w	O'Donnell, Conor	f	2333 e	1 - 0	Swanson, Stephen		2179
148	b	Grigoryan, Meri	wf	2053 e	1/2 - 1/2	Lampard, Alice	w	1746
					6 1/2 - 1 1/2			

Sunday morning (11 matches are played Saturday/Sunday across five separate weekends, with the finale in May seeing 3 rounds over the Bank Holiday weekend) brought us up against one of the strongest young teams in the league.

While our own prodigy Freddy

came unstuck in a theoretical Sveshnikov, Hamish drew with England’s brightest prospect. Overall a heavy defeat, but draws from Ian and Alice helped to keep it respectable and Wood Green Youth would go on to dismantle several opponents in similar fashion.

Round 3

	Alba			2252		Wood Green			2474
131	w	Waldhausen Gordon, Frederick	f	2338	0 - 1	Haria, Ravi		g	2498
132	b	Olson, Hamish	f	2336	1 - 0	Murphy, Conor E		i	2487
133	w	Gourlay, Iain	f	2301	0 - 1	Speelman, Jon S		g	2492
134	b	Berry, Neil	f	2257	0 - 1	Harvey, Marcus R		i	2464
135	w	Shafi, Declan		2179	½ - ½	Gasanov, Eldar		g	2487
136	b	McKay, Roderick M	i	2184	0 - 1	Turner, Matthew J		g	2448
137	w	Swanson, Stephen		2169	0 - 1	Wadsworth, Matthew J		i	2448
138	b	Roy, Ali	wf	1920	½ - ½	Toma, Katarzyna		wg	2364 e
					2 - 6				

A new year and another tough proposition, Wood Green’s fully-titled ‘A’ team, with former world title Candidate Jonathan Speelman on a lowly board 3.

Again, our female board, this time Ali, held her own with a great draw against the highly-rated WGM Katarzyna Toma.

 **Toma, Katarzyna (2364)**

 **Roy, Ali (1920)**

4NCL Division One 2024

1.e4 e6 2.d3 d5 3.♘d2 ♘f6
 4.♘gf3 c5 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♙g2
 ♙e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.e5 ♘d7
 9.♞e1 b6 10.h4 ♙b7 11.♘f1
 ♚c7 12.♙f4 a5 13.h5 b5
 14.♘1h2 a4 15.♘g4 b4 16.h6

DRAGON MASTERS

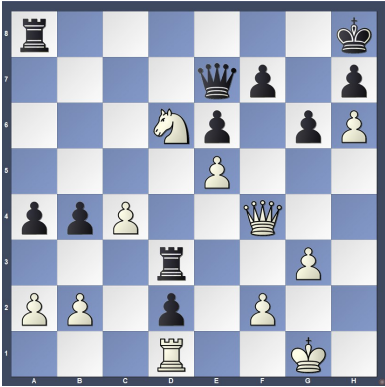
The Life and Times of the Fiercest Opening in Chess
Volume 1



Andrew Burnett



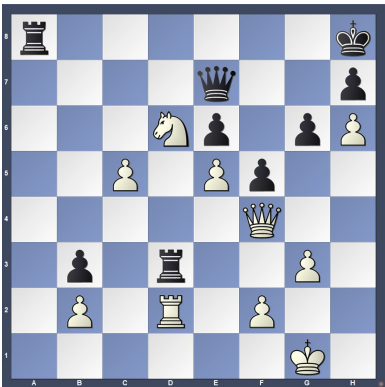
g6 17.c4 dxc4 18.dxc4 ♖fd8
 19.♔c1 ♘d4 20.♘xd4 cxd4
 21.♙g5 ♘c5 22.♙xe7 ♔xe7 23.
 ♙xb7 ♔xb7 24.♔f4 ♔e7 25.♖
 ad1 d3 26.♘f6+ ♔h8 27.♘
 e4 d2 28.♖e3 ♘d3 29.♖xd3
 ♖xd3 30.♘d6



White has just blundered away a sizeable advantage and Ali was quick to pounce...

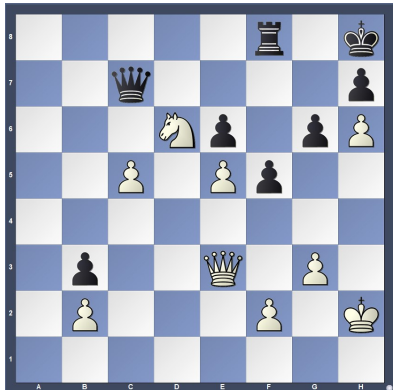
30...f5! 31.c5 Now 31.♖xd2 loses to 31...g5

31...b3 32.axb3 axb3 33.♖xd2



33...♖xd2?? 33...g5 34.♔b4
 ♖xd2 35.♔xd2 f4 was correct,
 as 36.gxf4 gxf4 37.♔xf4 ♖f8
 gives Black enough counter-play.

34.♔xd2 ♔c7 35.♔g5 ♖f8 36.
 ♔e3 ♖a8 37.♔h2 ♖f8



38.♔xb3?? and this blunder again throws away the win, although it was no longer so clear, despite the engine's insistence on 38.c6 ♔xc6 39.♔a7

38...♔xc5 39.♔b7 ♔xf2+ 40.♔h3

1/2-1/2

Hamish went one better and defeated Ireland's strongest active player...notes by Hamish.

♣ **Murphy, Conor (IM 2481)**

♣ **Olson, Hamish (2335) C54**

4NCL Division 1 2024

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5
4.c3 ♗f6 5.d3



One of the mainlines nowadays. The sheer number of subtly different move orders makes computer preparation less relevant and has proven appealing to a lot of players compared with having to face the Marshall or Open Ruy Lopez.

5.d4 This also is enjoying something of a revival of late and has encouraged a lot of players to play 3...Nf6. No free lunch there either though...

5...a5

I read in a Chessable course blurb that you could do ...a5/...Ba7/...d6 against anything in the d3 Italian. I've played various other systems here with decent success - playing sound openings like 1.e4 e5 gives you lots of options.

6.0-0 ♙a7 7.♖e1 d6 8.♗a3 0-0

8...h6 This would offer a slightly simpler life and turned out to be my prep – so many move orders in Italian, just too confusing!

9.♗b5

Here I started wondering (too late!) if I was meant to go h6 first. My prep involved ...Bb8 against Nb5 but I hadn't looked at Bg5 and was sure I would have checked it if it was possible!

9...♙b8

9...♙b6 This didn't occur to me (as my prep was ...Bb8) but apparently is a bit safer if I'm going to skip ...h6.

10.d4

10.♙g5 When deciding on ...Bb8 I had intended ...h6

+ ...Bg4 which is actually a bit worse for Black. While he was thinking on this move, I realised ...h6 + ...Ne7 would be fine, which is correct: 10...h6 11.♙h4 ♘g4 (11...♞e7 12.♙xf6 gxf6 A very appealing position for a former Sveshnikov player like myself although I would be terrified! 13.♞h4 c6 (13...♙g7; 13...f5) 14.♚h5 d5 15.♚xh6 f5=

I set a strict time limit on the prep as I didn't want to stress myself out, but somehow guessed that this Na3 approach and a plan of c4 would be Connor's most likely choice. I've seen a lot of his games from e.g. the Olympiad - it's impressive how well he can maintain the tension and slowly gain space.

This first line of the engine certainly wasn't calculated on move 10 – Black has alternatives that are reasonable though)

10...h6



Now we have transposed into something I'd looked at before the game. There were 6 players all roughly Connor's strength I could potentially have faced, and pairings were an hour before the round.

11.♙f1

11.h3 ♖e8 12.♙d3 ♞e7 13.c4 ♞g6 14.♙e3 c6 15.♞c3 was the sort of thing I was expecting. I didn't have any special idea but it's an interesting, healthy position.

11...♞e7

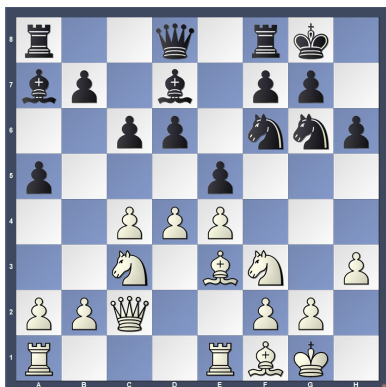
11...♖e8 This was my post-game note to myself, and I have no idea why I didn't do this considering it was something I'd seen against Bd3. I had looked at a few other things before the game quickly though so maybe I just didn't remember the exact details. My logic at the time was to try and save a tempo, as if White goes d5, the rook is better on f8 supporting f5.

12.c4 ♞g6 13.h3 c6 14.♞c3 ♙a7 15.♙e3 ♙d7

Not bad but the idea that follows is a bit artificial.

Apparently 15...♘h7 is best, I think I considered it but thought after Qd2 it wasn't much use, but 16.♙d2 ♚f6.

16.♙c2



16...♙b8

I've played this manoeuvre before, it can be good but really this is just so decentralising here when the centre is still fluid.

16...♘h4! Just not a candidate at all 17.♘xh4 exd4 18.♙f4 ♘h5 19.♙xd6 ♙xh4 20.g3 ♙d8 21.♙xf8 ♘xg3! only move, very cool!

17.♞ad1

17.dxe5!± ♘xe5 18.♘xe5 dxe5

19.c5 I've no idea what I was thinking as this is obviously good for White.

17...♞d8

17...b5± I couldn't make this work but apparently it's best

18.a4

18.c5±

18...♘f8?! For one moment I forgot that White's idea of c5 means defending e5 is very important, I realised straight away that I had been very careless.

18...♙c7

19.c5 exd4

19...♘e8 20.cxd6 exd4 I was trying desperately to make this work but my position is too horrible for words.

20.♙xd4 ♙xc5 21.♙xc5?±

21.♙xf6 Eventually I convinced myself that I'd somehow be fine here and maybe my confidence influenced Connor as he didn't play this. 21...gxf6 22.♘e2 ♙a7 23.♘g3 ♘g6 24.♘h5 ♙e6 25.b3

Forgotten Genius



The Life and Games of Grandmaster
Dragoljub Velimirovic

Volume 1

Georg Mohr
Ana Velimirovic - Zorica



Thinkers Publishing



(analysis diagram)

Computer doesn't even feel the need to take f6 yet – horrid!

21...dxc5 22.e5 ♘e8 23.♗d2
 ♗e6 24.♗b3?! ♗d4?!

24...b5 The computer suggests this but I was just so relieved to exchange all my terrible pieces with the following sequence.

25.♗xd4 cxd4 26.♖xd4 ♕f5
 27.♚d2 ♖xd4 28.♚xd4 ♚d8



I was moderately optimistic here that I was at least equal, perhaps coloured by memories of this game that I won nicely in a similar endgame against IM Neil Bradbury, which can be found here: <https://lichess.org/kOWuLaAt>

29.♖d1 ♚xd4 30.♖xd4 ♘c7
 31.g4 ♗e6 32.♖d6

32.♖d2 I expected this, but it doesn't make much difference to the evaluation. I was a lot more worried here but the computer gives +0.1 for this and 0.0 for Rd6.

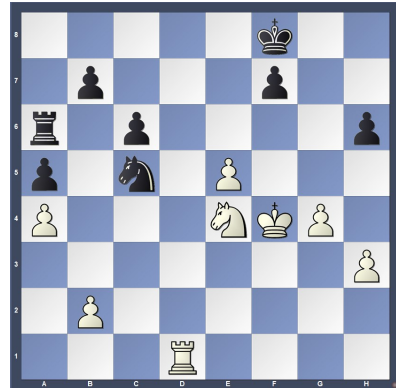
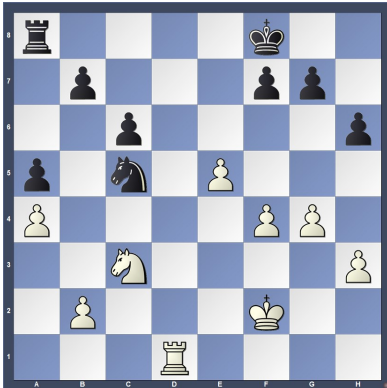
32...♕c2 33.♕c4 ♗c5 34.f4 I had been enjoying a time advantage for a while but now had a 10 minute think and found the only move that keeps it 0.00.

34...♚f8 White now drifts a little.

35.♖d2 ♕b3

35...♕xa4?? 36.♗xa4 ♗xa4
 37.♖d7 No thank you!

36.♕xb3 ♗xb3 37.♖d1 ♗c5
 38.♚f2



38...g5?!= I was sure I was better here.

38...♖a6!? This was very much on my radar - see my miss on move 24 of the Bradbury game which really stuck in my mind. I'm really not sure why I felt ... g5 was necessary – possibly just the common time-trouble tendency of playing forcing moves that everyone has to some extent (easier to calculate).

39.♔f3 gxf4 40.♔xf4 ♖a6

Still definitely the trickiest line but not as clear now that I've drawn White's king forwards to f4 and weakened my kingside.

41.♘e4

(see diagram next column)

He thought for an eternity here before offering a draw whilst looking absolutely disgusted with himself. Not sure if he felt he was worse or was just disappointed to draw with someone who puts their queen on b8. I thought I might be better and I feel confident in my end-game skills so didn't think much about taking it.

**41...♘xe4 42.♔xe4 ♖b6
43.♖d2 ♔e7 44.♔f5 ♖b4?!**

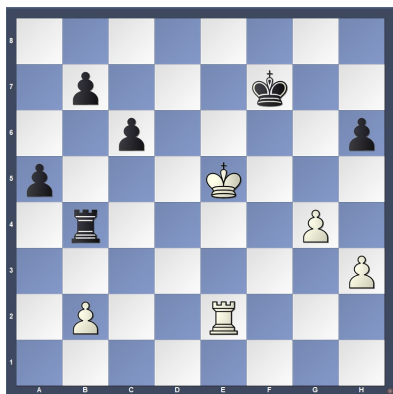
Played with misplaced confidence although White's resource is a bit tricky to spot in a game if you aren't expecting it. Probably playing this quickly was the best way to maximise my winning chances but if I'd seen White's resource I wouldn't have tried to bluff.

44...♖b3=

45. ♖e2?

45.e6! is even slightly better for White! 45...fxe6+ 46. ♔g6 ♜xa4 47. ♔xh6 ♜f4 48. ♜g2 e5 49.h4 ♜f6+ 50. ♔g5 ♔f7 51.h5 e4; 45.♜d6 I think I expected this and hoped my pawn mass was faster.

45...♜xa4 46.e6 ♜b4 47.exf7+ ♔xf7 48.♔e5



50. ♔f5 ♔h6 51. ♜e8 ♜xb2 Probably White can even draw this (too disgusted to check!)

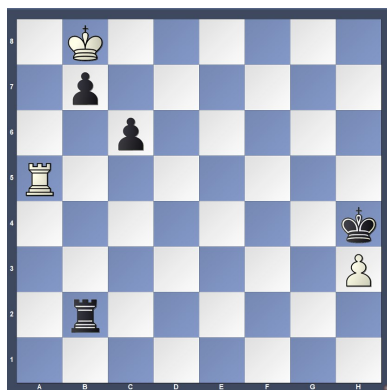
50...♜b5 51.♔c7

51.♜e6

51...♔h6 52.♔b8 ♔xh5

53.♜e7 ♜xb2 54.♜e5+ ♔h4

55.♜xa5



55...♔xh3

I panicked a bit about this as I thought it was quite an interesting idea but really I'm just seeing ghosts.

55...b5 This would have saved a bit of time, but I get there in the end.

48...h5?!

Absolutely no need for this.

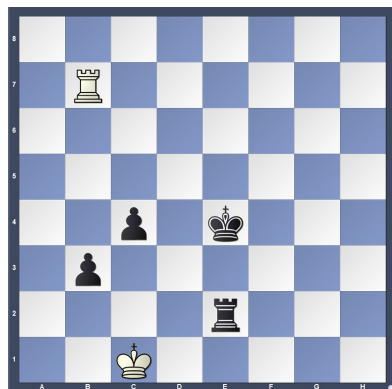
48...♔g6 and 48...a4 are good.

49.gxh5 ♔g7 50.♔d6?!

56.♔c7 ♔g4 57.♔d6 ♔f4 58.♜a4+ ♔e3 59.♔c5 ♜b5+ 60.♔c4 ♔e4 61.♜a8 ♔e5 62.♜d8 ♔e6 63.♜h8

♔d6 64.♜h7 ♜b1 65.♜h6+ ♔c7 66.♜h7+ ♔b6 67.♜h5 ♔a6 68.♜h8 b5+ 69.♔c5 ♜c1+ 70.♔b4 ♜c4+

71.♔b3 ♖b6 72.♞h6 ♞e4
 73.♞g6 b4 74.♞g5 c5 75.♔a4
 ♞e6 76.♞g8 ♞e3 77.♞g3 ♞e1
 78.♞g6+ ♔c7 79.♔b3 ♞e3+
 80.♔b2 ♔d7 81.♞h6 ♞e6
 82.♞h8 ♔c6 83.♞h5 ♔b5
 84.♔b3 ♞e3+ 85.♔b2 ♔c4
 86.♞h4+ ♔d5 87.♞h5+ ♔d4
 88.♞h7 c4 89.♞d7+ ♔e4
 90.♞b7 ♞e2+ 91.♔c1 b3



0-1

A good result and I did well to keep fighting but plenty to be improved on.

Round 4

	Chessable White Rose 2			2249		Alba			2252
161	w	Chow, Samuel	f	2338	1 - 0	Waldhausen Gordon, Frederick	f	2338	
162	b	Ashton, Adam G	f	2295	0 - 1	Olson, Hamish	f	2336	
163	w	Li, Harry		2255	e 0 - 1	Gourlay, Iain	f	2301	
164	b	Kisteneva, Lisa	wf	2287	e 0 - 1	McKay, Roderick M	i	2184	
165	w	Townsend, M Paul		2262	e 1 - 0	Swanson, Stephen		2169	
166	b	Chan, Sheng Liang Bernard		2180	e 0 - 1	Berry, Neil	f	2257	
167	w	Walton, Alan J	c	2131	e 0 - 1	Shafi, Declan		2179	
168	b	Gostelow, Luke		2039	e 1 - 0	Roy, Ali	wf	1920	
					3 - 5				

Not a draw in sight as February dawned and a battle against Chessable White Rose, the two sides separated by an average of just 3 Elo points.

Roddy finished off an interesting game with a king walk to add to victories for Iain and Declan...

♣ McKay, Roderick M
(IM 2184)

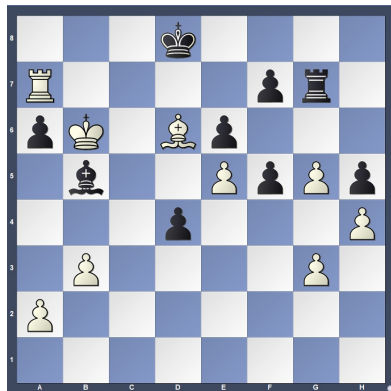
♣ Kisteneva, Lisa
(WFM 2287)

4NCL Division One 2024

the ultimate reinforcement, Nigel Short-style, for a swift mating net.

31.♔e3 ♖g7 32.♔d4 ♘b5
33.♔c5 ♘e2 34.♔c6 ♘b5+
35.♔b6 d4

1.d3 d5 2.f4 g6 3.♘f3 ♘g7
4.c3 ♘d7 5.e4 e6 6.e5 c5
7.♘a3 a6 8.♘c2 ♘e7 9.♙e3 b5
10.h4 h5 11.g3 ♖b8 12.♘g5
♘f5 13.♙f2 b4 14.cxb4 cxb4
15.♙h3 ♗a5 16.♗d2 ♘c5
17.♖c1 ♘xd3+ 18.♗xd3 b3+
19.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 20.♔xd2 bxc2
21.♖xc2 ♙d7 22.♙xf5 gxf5
23.♙c5 ♙h6 24.♙d6 ♖b7
25.♖hc1 ♙xg5 26.fxg5 ♔d8
27.b3 ♖e8 28.♖c7 ♖xc7
29.♖xc7 ♖g8 30.♖a7 ♙c6



36.♙e7+ ♔c8 37.♖a8+ and here Black resigned in view of

37...♔d7 38.♙f6 when

38...♖h7 38...♖g8 only delays the inevitable.

39.♖d8#

1-0

...while Hamish ground out a win in typical Olson fashion...

Material may be even but White's forces have tied Black's king and rook to miserable positions. Roddy brings in

♣ **Olson, Hamish (FM 2335)**
 ♣ **Ashton, Adam G (FM 2295)**

4NCL Division 1 2024

1. ♘f3

In my pre-game skim of his games I saw he didn't seem to have thought through his move orders against the Catalan/Reti/English too carefully so decided to ask him a few questions. It's one of the nicest features of the Catalan - you can try all sorts of move orders to get there.

1...d5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♖g2 e6 4.0-0 c5 5.d4 ♘c6 6.c4 dxc4



7.dxc5 Not to everyone's taste but I really like this endgame for White. Lots of interesting ideas :)

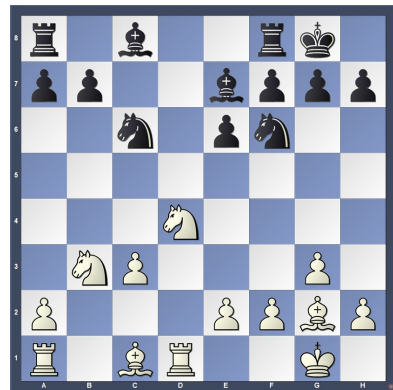
7. ♘e5 Neil played a great

game in this match with this move which I'd never really considered before; 7. ♖a4 This is the main move and quite pleasant too.

7... ♖xd1 8. ♖xd1 ♘xc5 9. ♘bd2 c3

Inflicting some structural damage to compensate for the beautiful Bg2

10.bxc3 0-0 11. ♘b3 ♖e7
 12. ♘fd4

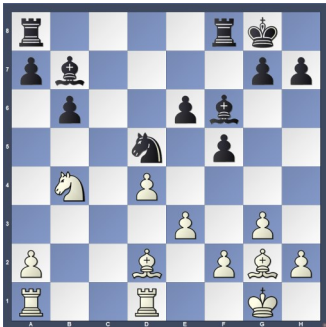


12... ♖d8

He'd already used 25 minutes here. I knew this wasn't the main move and felt that Bg5 was the most logical move to punish it.

12... ♘xd4 13.cxd4 ♘d5
 14. ♖d2 f5 15. ♘a5 b6 16. ♘c6

♙f6 17.e3 ♘b7 18.♞b4



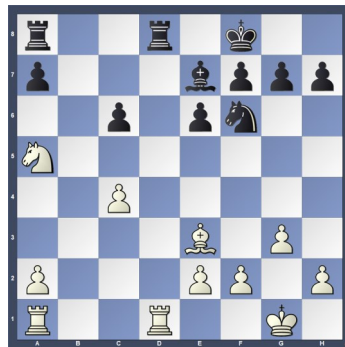
(analysis diagram)

Sielecki gives something like this in his Chessable course for Black - all I would change about his line is the equal evaluation at the end. In my opinion this whole thing is a tiny bit better for White as he can do some minority attack on the queenside. Of course, it's very playable for Black.

[Editor: this line was tested in captain Neil Berry's round 5 game against IM Jose Camacho Collados. White was better/winning at several stages of the game before Black escaped with a rather fortunate draw.

In a sign of just how popular this position has been recently, I faced 12...♙d7 in a very recent league game.

After 13.♞xc6 ♙xc6 14.♙xc6 bxc6 15.c4 ♖fd8 16.♙e3 ♔f8 17.♞a5



(analysis diagram)

White had the kind of seriously annoying niggles that Hamish talks about, although I only drew. Burnett, A - Henderson, D Newcastle 2024.]

13.♙g5 ♙d7 14.♞xc6 ♙xc6 15.♙xc6 bxc6 16.♞a5

16.c4 A friend pointed out on Facebook that this was more accurate, preventing ...Rd5 which we both missed (as did Giri and most of the players who reached this position).

16...♖ac8

16...♖d5=

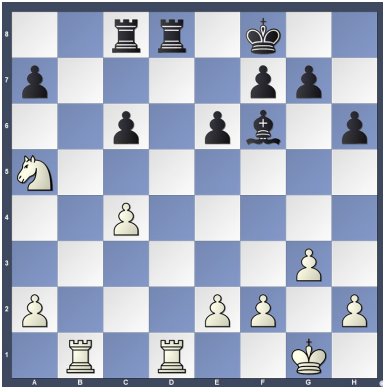
17.♖ab1

17.c4±

17...h6

17...♖d5 This is even -0.1. I completely missed this whole idea. 18.♙xf6 ♜xf6 19.♘c4 ♙xc3 20.♖xd5 exd5 (20...cxd5 21.♘d6 ♜f8 22.♘b5 ♙f6 23.♘xa7) 21.♘d6 White is active enough to hold on.

18.♙xf6 ♜xf6 19.c4 ♔f8



A very similar (and much better) game with this structure and pieces was Giri - Wojtaszek, <https://lichess.org/EY2X3uiN>, pointed out to me by Andy B on Facebook after the game. Giri exchanged a pair of rooks, put his knight on b3 (controlling all entry points), rook on c1 and pushed c5. Usually, Giri is a good person to follow, even more so in the Catalan.

20.♜d3 Quite an interesting try although objectively I go from 0.2 to -0.1. Now the game is going to be a little more imbalanced and the d-file is blocked, so I can play on the b-file unencumbered by counterplay on d2.

20.♔g2

20...♜xd3 21.exd3 ♙c3

21...♙d8 22.♘b7 ♙b6 23.c5 ♜c7 24.a4 ♜xb7 25.a5 ♔e7 26.a6 ♜d7 27.♜xb6= is the computer's rather cute first line :)

22.♘b7

It took me 8 mins to convince myself this wasn't too fancy, but I really wanted to give him things to think about and press my edge on the clock (and on the board I felt)

22...♔e7

Another 11 mins burnt and allowing me into c5 moves the dial slightly in my favour.

22...♙d4=

23.♘c5 ♜c7 24.♜b8 ♙d4 25.♘b3 ♜d7 26.♜c8 ♙e5 Not conceding any ground.

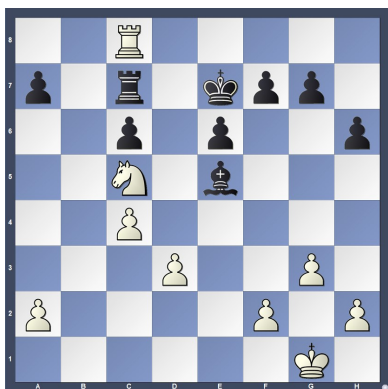
26...c5 This is a tiny concession

27.♘c5

I took me 5 minutes to realise Na5 wouldn't win a piece due to ...Kf6

27.♘a5 ♖xd3 28.♘xc6+ ♔f6
29.♘xe5 ♕xe5 3.♖c7 ♔f6 31.♖xa7 ♖c3 32.♖a4 I saw this but refused to take it seriously.

27...♖c7



28.♖a8

Often trading rooks is a good thing for the knight in BvsN endgames but my rook is way too active to trade for his.

28...♕d4 29.♘b3 e5

30.♖b8

A little bit aimless and it is probably better on a8, but still fine.

30...♔d7±

Not too sure what this is for.

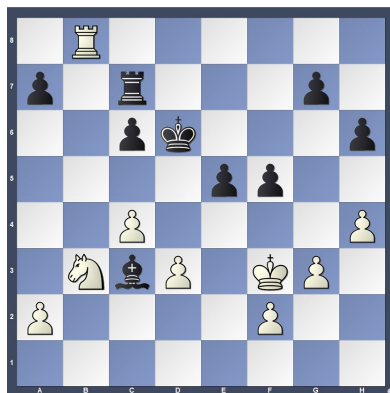
31.♔g2 f5 32.h4±

32.♘xd4± exd4 33.♔f3 and now 33...♔e6 34.h4! I think I missed this move but that is quite careless as I was definitely looking at Nxd4.

32...♕c3

32...♖c8 Amazingly this is playable 33.♖xc8 ♔xc8 34.♘xd4 exd4 35.♔f3 ♔d7 36.♔f4 ♔e6 37.h5 c5=

33.♔f3 ♔d6



34. ♖f8?!

Now I lose control - props to my opponent for grabbing his chance with 2 mins on the clock. 34.h5± This would continue the grind.

34...a5!= I completely missed this.

35. ♖d8+ ♖d7 36. ♖a8 ♔c7 Was very relieved to see this. 36...♖b7 I was dreading this one as I was sure Black was fine.

37. ♔e2

37. ♘c5 is a bit more precise, preventing the ...Rd8 resource

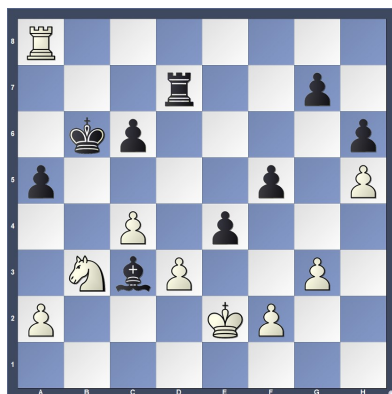
37...♔b6?!

37...♖d8!= 38. ♖xd8 (38. ♖a7+ ♔b6 39. ♖xg7 e4) 38...♔xd8 Not an easy endgame to assess especially when short on time like he was.

38. h5±

38. ♖a6+ ♔xa6 39. ♘c5+ ♔b6 40. ♘xd7+ ♔c7 41. ♘c5 g6 I considered this but it's equal.

38...e4

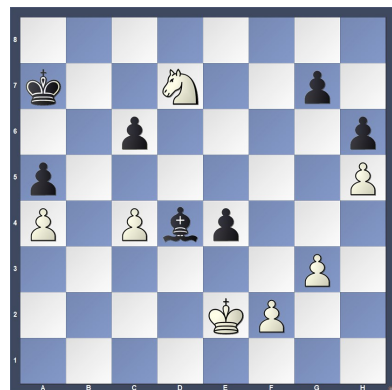


This move equalises against everything other than the following sequence. He had 2s when he made the move.

39. dxe4 fxe4 40. ♖a6+

What he missed. Now he has to push ...c5 in the resulting endgame and will lose the game due to all his pawns being fixed on dark squares - "Good Knight, Bad Bishop".

40...♔xa6 41. ♘c5+ ♔a7
42. ♘xd7 ♖d4 43. a4





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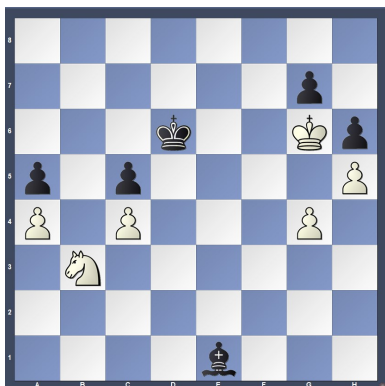
"Do not hurry" - fixing the a5 pawn can only be a gain for White

43...♔b7 44.♞f8 c5

This is forced sooner or later. Otherwise, he will lose g7 or e4

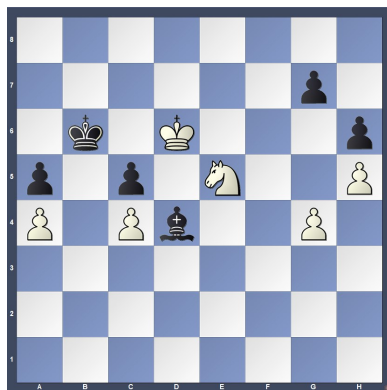
45.f3 exf3+ 46.♔xf3 ♔c6
 47.♔e4 ♔d6 48.♔f5 ♕c3 I felt the knight's best square was b3 as it introduces zugzwangs, so...

49.♞e6 ♕b2 50.♞f4 ♕c3
 51.♞d3 ♕d4 52.♞c1 ♕b2
 53.♞b3 ♕c3 54.g4 ♕e1
 55.♔g6



55...♕c3
 55...♔e5 56.♔xg7 Races in bishop vs knight can get a bit scary for the knight as the bishop can influence both sides, but this is nowhere near.

56.♔f7 ♔c6 57.♔e6 ♕e1
 58.♞c1 ♕c3 59.♞d3 ♕d4
 60.♞e5+ ♔b6 61.♔d6



He'd seen enough.

1-0

10. ♖xg6 hxg6 11. ♕b5 ♖e7 25. ♕d7! Suzie immediately pounces on the weakness created by Black's previous move.
 12. 0-0 0-0 13. a4 ♖fc8 14. h3 c4
 15. ♖fe1 ♖a5 16. e4



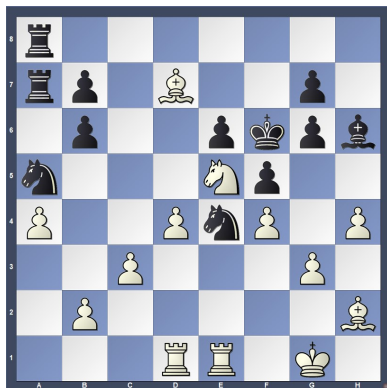
16... ♖ca8?? A blunder, after which Black's position falls apart.

17. exd5 ♖xd5 17... exd5
 18. ♕xc6 bxc6 19. ♖xe7

18. ♕g3 ♖5a7 19. ♖xc4 ♖a5
 20. ♖e3 ♖f6 21. ♖ad1 ♖e4 22.
 ♕c7 ♕d8 23. ♕h2 ♕h4 24. ♖g4
 f5



25... ♖f7 26. ♖e5+ ♖f6 27. g3
 ♕g5 28. h4 ♕h6 29. f4!



White can legitimately argue they are a piece up already.

29... ♖b3 30. g4 ♖bd2 31. g5+
 ♖e7 32. ♕b5 Black had seen enough.

1-0

Round 6

There is little let up in the first division of the 4NCL, and next up were Blackthorne, sporting GM Danny Gormally on board 3.

Alba			2254	Blackthorne			2329	
141	w	Olson, Hamish	f	2348	1 - 0	Ansell, Simon T	i	2400 e
142	b	Waldhausen Gordon, Frederick	f	2365	½ - ½	Bates, Richard A	i	2385 e
143	w	Gourlay, Iain	f	2301	½ - ½	Gormally, Daniel W	g	2419
144	b	Berry, Neil	f	2258	½ - ½	Ledger, Andrew J	i	2376 e
145	w	McKay, Roderick M	i	2186	0 - 1	Ledger, Dave J	f	2294 e
146	b	Vijayakumar, Rishi		2166	½ - ½	Duncan, Chris R	f	2274 e
147	w	Swanson, Stephen		2156	0 - 1	Varney, Zoe	wc	2155 e
148	b	Cooke, Suzie G.	wf	1925	1 - 0	Ledger, Stephen C		2112 e
				4 - 4				

Iain Gourlay held him comfortably though, and with another excellent win for Suzie, and Hamish also producing the goods, it was left to Neil Berry to do the captain's job of saving the match...

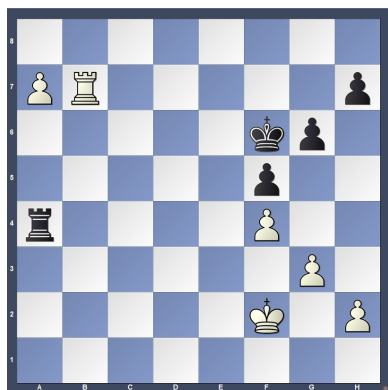
♣ **Ledger, Andrew (IM 2376)**

♣ **Berry, Neil (FM 2258)**

4NCL Division One 2024

1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.g3 ♘f6
4.♙g2 c5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.d4
♘c6 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.dxc5 ♙xc5
9.a3 ♘e4 10.b4 ♙e7 11.♘fd2
f5 12.♙b2 ♙f6 13.♙xf6 ♙xf6
14.♘b3 ♙e6 15.♘1d2 0-0
16.♘f3 d4 17.♙d3 ♙fd8
18.♙ac1 ♘e5 19.♘xe5 ♙xe5
20.♘c5 ♙d5 21.f4 ♘c5
22.♙xc5 ♙e6 23.♙xd5 ♙xd5
24.♙fc1 ♙e8 25.♙xd5 ♙xd5
26.♙c5 ♙a2 27.♙f2 g6

28.♙c4+ ♙xc4 29.♙xc4 ♙d8
30.♙c7 d3 31.exd3 ♙xd3 32.a4
a5 33.bxa5 ♙b3 34.♙c8+ ♙g7
35.♙b8 ♙b4 36.a6 ♙xa4
37.♙xb7+ ♙f6 38.a7

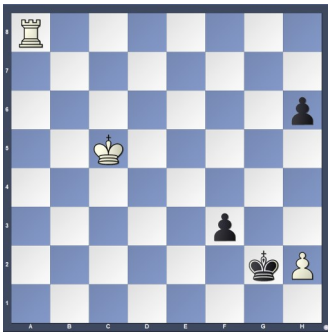


With White's rook on a8, this position would be a theoretical draw. With the rook defending from the side, however, it is (or should be) a straightforward win.

38...h6 39.h4

Not throwing away the win, but unnecessary.

Let's see the straightforward approach first: 39.♔e2 is correct. 39...g5 4.♔d3 ♔g6 41.♔c3 ♔h5 42.♔b3 ♖a1 43.♔c4 ♔g4 44.♔b5 gxf4 45.gxf4 ♔xf4 46.♔b6 ♔g4 (46...♔f3 47.♖b8 ♔g2 48.a8♚+ ♖xa8 49.♖xa8 f4 50.♔c5 f3

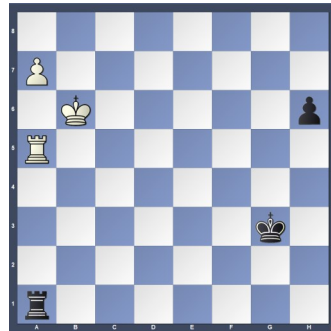


(analysis diagram)

51.h4 Only this move wins here. (51.♔d4?? f2 is a draw. 52.♖g8+ ♔xh2) 51...f2 52.♖g8+ ♔h2 53.♖f8 ♔g1 54.h5 f1♚ 55.♖xf1+ ♔xf1 56.♔d5 ♔f2 57.♔e4 ♔g3 58.♔f5 wins) 47.♖b8 ♔h3 48.♖f8 ♔xh2 49.♖f5 ♔g3 and now a typical winning motif 50. ♖a5

(see diagram next column)

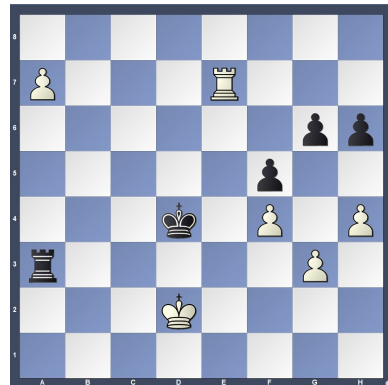
39...♖a3 40.♔e2 ♔e6 4...g5 would be similar to the lines above, winning for White. Neil decides to cause White some



(analysis diagram)

practical issues by getting active.

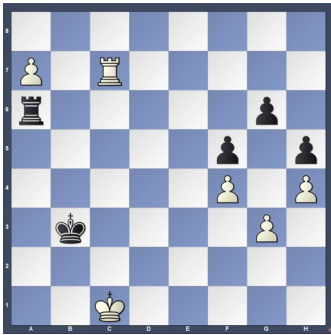
41.♔d2 ♔d5 42.♖e7 ♔d4



43.♔e2?? 43.♔c2 ♔c4 44.♖c7+ ♔b4 45.♔d2 h5 46.♔e2 ♔b5 47.♖g7 wins everything on the kingside. 47...♖a6 failing to, amongst others, 48.♖xg6.

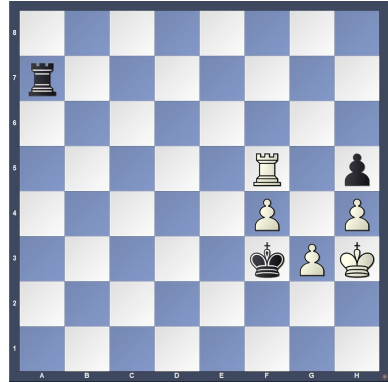
43...♖a2+ 44.♔f3 44.♔d1 h5 45.♔c1 ♔c3 46.♖c7+ ♔b3 47.♖b7+ ♔c3 48.♔b1 ♖a6

49.♖c7+ ♔b3 50.♔c1



(analysis diagram)

49.♖f6 ♖xa7 50.♖xf5



50...♖a2! 51.♖g7 ♔c3! is the drawing plan in the centre and queenside. White instead heads for the kingside but can never profitably release the king.

and here a draw was agreed in view of:

50...♖a1 51.♔h2 ♖a2+ 52.♔h3 ♖a1 53.♔h2 ♖a2+ 54.♔g1 ♔xg3 55.♖g5+ ♔xh4

44...♖a3+ 45.♔g2 ♖a2+
46.♔h3 h5 47.♖g7 ♔e4
48.♖xg6 ♔f3

A dramatic escape for Neil, and also for the team who had snatched half a match point from the jaws of defeat!

48...♖xa7 is also good enough for the draw.

1/2-1/2

Division One														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	MP	GP
1 Wood Green		4½-3½		6-2	5½-2½	6-2			7-1		5½-2½		12	34½
2 The Sharks 1	3½-4½		5-3					5½-2½		6½-1½	7½-½	6½-1½	10	34½
3 Manx Liberty		3-5		4½-3½	5-3		5-3		6-2			6½-1½	10	30
4 Wood Green Youth	2-6		3½-4½			6½-1½	5½-2½	6-2		6-2			8	29½
5 Cheddleton	2½-5½		3-5				4-4	5½-2½	5-3		7½-½		7	27½
6 Alba	2-6			1½-6½			4-4	4½-3½		5-3	4½-3½		7	21½
7 Blackthorne			3-5	2½-5½	4-4	4-4			4½-3½			5-3	6	23
8 Chessable White Rose 1		2½-5½		2-6	2½-5½	3½-4½				7½-½		4½-3½	4	22½
9 Barnet Knights A	1-7		2-6		3-5		3½-4½			4-4	6-2		3	19½
10 Chessable White Rose 2		1½-6½		2-6		3-5		½-7½	4-4			4½-3½	3	15½
11 Celtic Tigers 1	2½-5½	½-7½			½-7½	3½-4½			2-6			4½-3½	2	13½
12 Oxford 1		1½-6½	1½-6½				3-5	3½-4½		3½-4½	3½-4½		0	16½

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When an international chess tournament goes wrong!

Alastair Dawson shares an example from the International Chess Open, Hotel Meliá, Benidorm, Spain



For a small band of Scottish chess players, an annual winter trip to Benidorm, Spain, has been a regular occurrence for several years. After all, there are many things in favour of exchanging Scotland's freezing winter temperatures for the warmth of the Mediterranean sun.

My first experience of winter chess in Benidorm was nearly a decade ago when a group of us headed out to the Grand Bali Hotel in Benidorm where several hundred players, mostly from

Spain but also a scattering from across Europe, competed in two gruelling tournaments. The tougher of the two competitions was a 9-round Open tournament that was open to players up to FIDE 2300 rating. The second tournament was for players up to FIDE 2000 grade. Both tournaments routinely had over 250 competitors.

The Grand Bali is a spectacular venue. It is the tallest hotel in Benidorm with all the facilities one could wish for including a

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huge swimming pool and a luxurious restaurant. There was a large prize fund also from which our good friend and much-missed Joe Parks was a regular recipient.

In December 2022, we became aware of a second major chess tournament in Benidorm. This one was advertised as the Benidorm International

Open. To the outsider it appeared to be an alternative tournament to the Grand Bali with similar prize money and taking place at approximately the same time as the Grand Bali tournament.

This new chess congress was to be held at the Hotel Melia, another outstanding venue and in a different part town, equally luxurious and just a 10-minute walk from the beach. One of the tournaments had the same entry requirements as the Grand Bali (below FIDE 2000 grade); the other was slightly different being an

Open with no upper rating limit – meaning that IMs and GMs were also welcomed.

For the Scottish players a choice had to be made in respect of which tournament to play in. The split was about even. For myself, I chose the Hotel Melia tournament. When I arrived, I also met IM Stephen Mannion

“...I noticed that none of our games had appeared on the FIDE rating list...”

and Ian Aird. Whereas Stephen was entered in the top event, Ian and myself were content to compete in the FIDE under 2000 competition. A great time was had by all, and, as I remember, we all won some prize money too. But in the months that followed, I noticed that none of our games had appeared on the FIDE rating list. As we moved into spring 2023, it became clear that either the organisers had forgotten to enter the results or else there must have been some sort of computer glitch.

After all, if all the other competitors were in the same position, there potentially may have been around 2,500 games played from the two tournaments that were not showing on the FIDE rating list.

So, we move forward to 2023. Again, the chess websites were showing two separate venues (the Grand Bali Hotel and the Hotel Melia) advertising identical tournaments as the previous year. The prize money was the same, the grading entry requirements were the same but there was one big difference. Whereas the Grand Bali tournaments were scheduled for the same time at the start of December, the Hotel Melia tournament had been brought forward to start on October 28th through to a finish on November 5th.

For the Scottish players, some chose the Grand Bali and others chose the Hotel Melia tournaments. With much greater stamina than Stephen or I, Willie Ruth-

erford entered the tournaments at both venues!

For myself, family reasons dictated that the Grand Bali December dates were not possible and so I chose to enter the FIDE under 2000 competition at the Hotel Melia (this despite the fact that a year on from the 2022 tournament, none of the games played by Stephen, Ian and myself, had appeared on the FIDE rating list. I hear you say, ‘..more fool you..’ for entering an international tournament that had been purported as FIDE-rated the previous year but where our games never appeared on the rating list. I suppose the lure of 9 competitive chess games in a wonderful hotel with great food, plus the warm weather of course, was just too tempting to turn down. This time, when I arrived, I found myself in the company of two good chess friends – Stephen Mannion and Willie Rutherford.

To cut a long story short, the three of us had a wonderful 9

days. Stephen had a great tournament in the Open event scoring 5.5/9. Willie also competed in the Open but found the going tough scoring 3/9. That said, the level of competition was extremely high and was won by GM Francesco Sonis (2564) closely followed by a cluster of FMs, IMs and GMs the latter group including GM Keith Arkell. For me, as the sole Scot in the under-2000 tournament it went well with a score of 5.5./9.

One might think that this is the end of the story but in another sense, it was just the beginning. The good news was that in the weeks that followed, unlike the previous year, our games were indeed submitted for FIDE rating. Stephen and I both won prize money. However, the bad news was that the prize money was not forthcoming. Since early November and after numerous e-mails, it

felt as if we were up against a brick wall. Our Spanish friends tried to contact the organisers also but even this got us nowhere. We now understand that in respect of the December 2022 tournament, for the games not to be graded, the tournament organisers must have failed to register

“...the bad news was that the prize money was not forthcoming...”

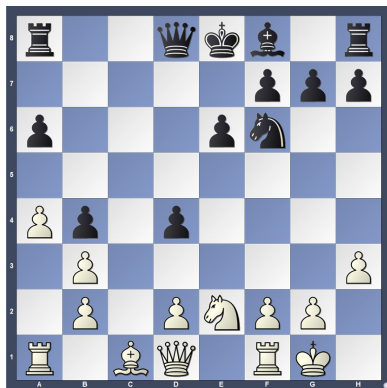
the tournament with FIDE. Finally, some good news – we learned yesterday, more

than 2 months after the tournament had finished, that money was being paid into our bank accounts.

In the meantime, the 2024 Benidorm chess tournaments have already been advertised. One thing is for sure – we will not be going back to play in chess tournaments hosted at the Hotel Melia. It is a shame that such a wonderful hotel is associated with two international chess tourna-

ments that are not run in ways that one would normally hope and expect.

Attached is a game from the 2023 tournament. It is over 100 moves long and an exciting draw against one of the tournament favourites.



♣ **Bote Kolobo,B**

♠ **Dawson,A**

Benidorm Sub-2000, 2023

This game was against the tournament winner of a couple of years previous. That said, his opening moves were not the best - but thereafter White keeps generating tactic after tactic.

1.e4 c6 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 ♔g4
 4.h3 ♕xf3 5.♙xf3 e6 6.exd5
 cxd5 7.♖b5+ ♘c6 8.0-0 a6
 9.♗a4 b5 10.♖b3 ♘f6 11.a4
 ♘d4 12.♙d1 ♘xb3 13.cxb3 b4
 14.♘e2 d4

(see diagram next column)

So, this is the critical move – is it good or weakening. Black wanted to limit the mobility of the white pieces. On the other

hand, moving the d-pawn forward like this makes it a target.

15.d3 ♗e7 16.♗f4

Black sees that Be5 is coming and the d4-pawn might fall. Black has the choice of tying himself in knots trying to hold on to the pawn. Or, he can seek dynamic play for his pieces – and this is what he decided to do; it works out well.

16...0-0 17.♗e5 ♙d5

Black elects to develop his pieces along the d-file. Eventually the bishop will have to move. When it does, Black will be able to take advantage of the pressure that he has developed down the d-file.

18.♗xd4 ♖fd8 19.a5 e5 20.♗b6

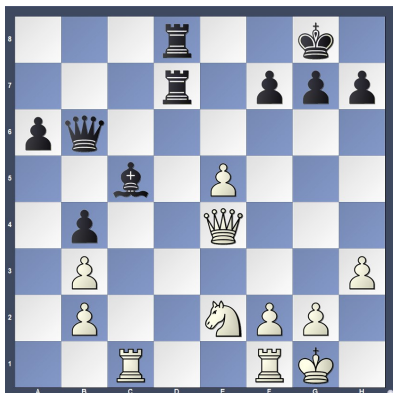
This is the next problem –

Black realises that it is imperative to dislodge the Bb6 and the way to do this is to get a knight to d5.

28. ♖g4 ♔h8 29. ♞e4 ♚e7
 30. ♔h1 h5 31. ♜f4 ♚g7
 32. ♜fe1 ♜d4 33. ♞e3 ♜e6
 34. ♜g3 h4

20... ♜d7 21. d4 ♜b5 22. ♜c2
 ♞d5 23. ♜e4 ♞xb6 24. axb6
 ♜ad8 25. dxe5 ♜xb6 26. ♜ac1
 ♚c5

In the manoeuvring in the centre, Black manages to win White's e5-pawn through a tactic.



35. ♜f3 ♜xe5 36. ♞d2 ♜f6
 37. ♞c4 ♜xf3 38. ♜xf3 ♜d1+
 39. ♜xd1 ♜xd1+ 40. ♚h2 ♚d6+
 41. g3 hxg3+ 42. fxg3

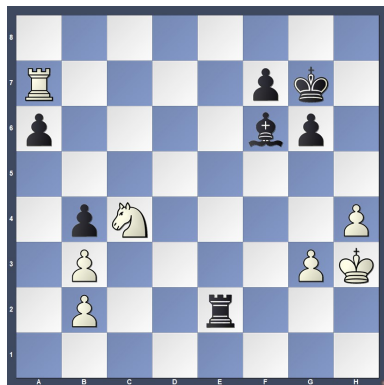
Black now has a slight initiative but loses his way a little bit with non-forcing moves.

42... ♚c5 43. h4 ♜e1 44. ♜d3 ♜e2+
 45. ♚h3 ♚e7 46. ♜d7 ♚f6
 47. ♜a7

All of a sudden Black has an excellent position. Black was now looking at sacrifices on f2 that could win the game but White evades them all with some astute moves.

27. ♞g3 g6

Sadly the sacrifice on f2 followed by rook checks on d1 do not work completely since White has a back-rank check on c8 – hence the need for ...g6.



The knight on c4 is enormously strong. Black tries to use the sledgehammer of rook com-

lined with bishop to capture the b2-pawn. **68.h5**

47...♙xb2 48.♖xa6 ♘c3 49.♖a7 ♗e6 50.g4 ♖f6 51.♔g2 ♖f4 52.♔g3 ♖f6 53.♖e7 ♖f1

Now we enter an equal ending; Black struggles to find a way forward that would give an advantage.

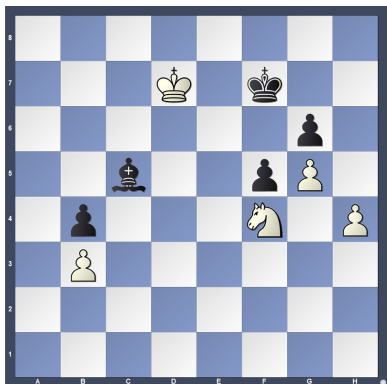
54.♖e4 ♖f6 55.♘e3 ♖e6 56.♔f3 ♖xe4 57.♔xe4

Now Black has the inactive king while has the powerful king.

57...♙e1 58.♘g2 ♘g3 59.♔f3 ♘d6 60.♔e4 ♔f6 61.♔d5 ♙e7 62.♘e3 ♔g7 63.g5 f5 64.♘g2 ♔f7 65.♘f4 ♘d8 66.♔c6 ♙e7

White has the initiative.

67.♔d7 ♘c5



A brilliant move that Black had missed – all the key lines end with a knight fork of king and bishop, so Black loses a pawn.

68...gxh5 69.g6+ ♔g8 70.♘xh5

This position looks desperate for Black, but as the moves that follow show, there is no way through for White.

70...♙d4 71.♔e6 f4 72.♘xf4 ♘e3 73.♔f5 ♘d2

White tries everything now to encircle the black king and push the pawn through – but nothing works!

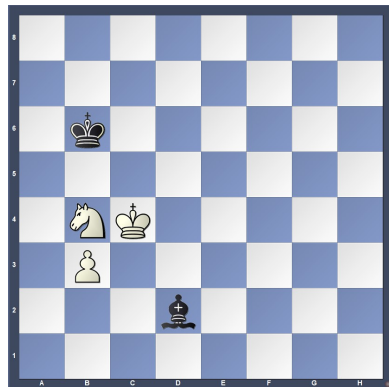
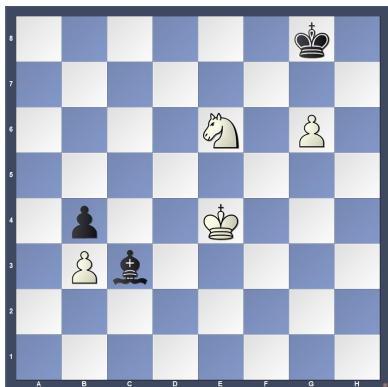
74.♘d5 ♔g7 75.♘f6 ♘c3 76.♘h5+ ♔g8 77.♔e6 ♘b2 78.♔e7 ♘c3 79.♔e6 ♘b2 80.♔d5 ♘c3 81.♔c4 ♘e1 82.♔d3 ♘c3 83.♔e3 ♘b2 84.♔f4 White tries one last time.

84...♘c3 85.♔g5 ♘b2 86.♘g3 ♘c3 87.♘e4 ♘b2 88.♘c5 ♘c3 89.♘a6 ♔g7 90.♘b8 ♘d2+ 91. ♔f5 ♘c3 92.♘c6 ♘d2 93.♘d8 ♘c3 94.♘e6+ ♔g8 95.♔e4

(see diagram next column)

but eventually gives up and tries to win the b-pawn.

...and now is the moment to salvage the draw!



95...♙e1 96.♚d3 ♘c3 97.♚c4 ♙e1 98.♜f4 ♚g7 99.♜d3 ♘d2 100.♜xb4 ♚xg6 101.♜c6 ♜f4 ♘d2 123.♜d3 ♚b6 124.♜e5 Or 124.♜c5 ♙e1 125.♜a4+ ♚c6 126.♜c3 ♘xc3 127.♚xc3 ♚c5

101...♚f6 102.♚d3 ♙e1 103.♜d4 ♚e7 104.♜f3 ♘a5 105.♚c4

Black must not exchange off the bishop until exactly the right moment.

105...♚d6 106.♚b5 ♘c3 107.♜g5 ♚c7 108.♜e6+ ♚b8 109.♚c6 ♙e1 110.♜c5 ♘d2 111.♜e4 ♙e1 112.♚b5 ♚b7 113.♚c4 ♚c6 114.♜c5 ♘d2 115.♜d3 ♚b6 116.♜b2 ♚c6 117.♜d1 ♙e1 118.♜b2 ♘d2 119.♜d3 ♚b6 120.♜b4

124...♙e1

1/2-1/2

[Editor's note: If you have encountered issues in a tournament outside of Scotland, please contact me in my other role as International Director for Chess Scotland and I will attempt to put things right. Happily, in this instance Alastair and Steve received their long overdue prizes. Also, if you have played somewhere recently, why not share your story with other CS members!]



Top Boy and Girl

Chess Scotland

The home of Chess in Scotland

Player of the Year 2023

The Chess Scotland Junior Board are delighted to announce Louis Cheng and Chrysa Mitraka as award winners for 2023.

In what was an incredibly strong year for our junior players, Louis becoming FIDE World Champion at the 2023 U8 Blitz Cadets as well as his performances for our Robinson Team at the Glorney and Chrysa's consistently strong improvement and performances for Scotland as part of the Gilbert Team, proved to be the deciding factors.

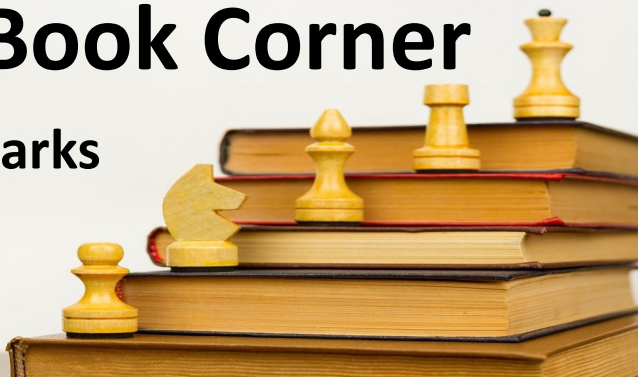
A memento will be presented to both at a future date.



Good luck to all of our junior players in 2024!

Chess Book Corner

with Ian Marks



This month sees Cumbernauld’s finest, [Ian Marks](#), delve into one of the most important books of the year – the “behemoth” collection of Gennadi Sosonko’s much-vaunted *New in Chess* columns and miscellaneous extra writings.

THE ESSENTIAL SOSONKO
by Genna Sosonko, *New in Chess*, 839 pp., publ. 2023.

Weighing in at an impressive 1.75 kilos and 6 cm thick, you wouldn’t carry this behemoth around to while away a bus journey or dip into over a latte at your favourite coffee shop, which is probably as it should be, for it’s the sort of work which deserves to be savoured, read at leisure without distraction.

It is a collection of Sosonko’s essays from *New in Chess* magazine

and his earlier works, plus some new material on, for example, Bronstein and Kasparov. Practically every major figure in recent-ish Soviet/Russian chess features, e.g. Geller, Korchnoi, Keres, Botvinnik and Petrosian to name but a few, plus many lesser-known names such as Zak, Lutikov and Khasin.

Sosonko brings them to life, conveying their characters, idiosyncrasies, foibles, strengths and weaknesses, so that what might just have been names acquire real flesh and blood. He also accords the same treatment to many



The Essential Sosonko

*Collected Portraits and Tales
of a Bygone Chess Era*



GENNA SOSONKO

*'Each new story of Genna Sosonko is the
preservation of grains of our chess life'*
from the foreword by Garry Kasparov

NEW IN CHESS

great players of the past, such as Capablanca, Euwe and Alekhine, and to non-Russians such as Miles and Pachman.

Sosonko grew up and lived in the Soviet Union before emigrating to the Netherlands in 1972, so knows full well the mores which were part and parcel of everyday life in such a closed society and the conformity and compromises which were necessary to get by. As he points out on many occasions throughout the book, it is hard for those who have never lived under such a regime to understand just what it was like. (*In order to survive, they either had to conform, or to mimic, and there were no ready-made prescriptions for how to live a worthy life in those blood-thirsty times.*) Only someone with such life experience could write with authority and understanding of the circumstances in which they found themselves.

By far the majority of the players about whom he writes were personal friends or those he rubbed shoulders with on the Soviet chess scene. Ditto those he met, or took up with again, during his visits back to Russia after the col-



Genna Sosonko, grandmaster and 11-time Olympian for the Netherlands, would become at least as well known as a writer and author

lapse of communism. There is much material that only a close insider could be privy to, and his respect and empathy for his subjects are evident.

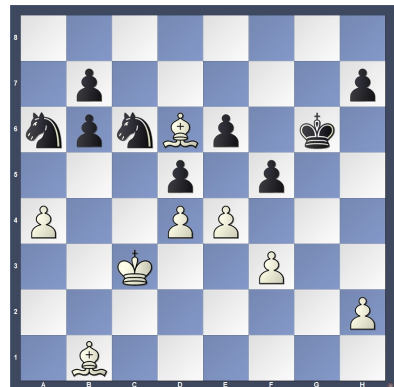
Each chapter is highly readable and fascinating, but some are particularly interesting. Sosonko writes at length about Korchnoi, with whom he was not only friendly, but also acted as trainer. The circumstances surrounding Korchnoi's defection to the West in 1976 make for great reading. The loss of one of their big hitters might have come as a shock to the authorities in Moscow, but

Sosonko explains: *'It was anything but an impulsive decision. In January of that year, at the tournament in Hastings, Korchnoi and I had spent nearly every evening weighing up every possible means for him to defect to the West.'* Shades of le Carré!

After Korchnoi's death, Sosonko acquired some of his old friend's effects at an auction. Amongst the items was the reason for his interest – Korchnoi's unused return air ticket of 27 July 1976 from Amsterdam to Moscow, a real chess historical artefact if ever there was one. *'Forty-two years ago that unused ticket not only left a gaping hole in Soviet chess, but also soon became the crater of an active volcano that forced not only the functionaries of the chess federation and Sports Committee to worry considerably, but also the brass at the very top of the pyramid of power in the Soviet Union.'* How can you not be gripped by this sort of thing?

That said, two chapters in particular stand out – the essays on David Bronstein and Mikhail Tal. Bronstein comes across as a real character in myriad ways.

Clearly a brilliant chess mind (*'David Bronstein was world championship calibre!' – Smyslov*), he is best known for tying the 1951 world championship match 12-12 with Mikhail Botvinnik. The artist within him subsequently claimed that he never set out to win it (*'I didn't want to beat Botvinnik, you understand, I didn't play for fame...I played for the public.'*), but it is clear that not playing the drawing line in the fateful 23rd game (he went on to lose) preyed on his mind for the rest of his days. If ever one move – 43...Na7, which would most likely have clinched the match – could be said to have changed the course of chess history, this was it.



The position in question. Bronstein played 43...Kf6 and lost the game.

He found plenty of excuses at the time (Botvinnik hated him, his seconds let him down, even his girlfriend copped for it), but had to live with it, and it undoubtedly contributed to the air of tetchiness that he often exhibited later as the same old topics from his past were rehashed.

The pre- and post-match Bronsteins were different people: *'In his subsequent tournament practice there are brilliant games, spectacular moves, original ideas, but there is no constant flight of inspiration...Here and there you can still see the former power, but in the vast majority of them, joy and struggle are missing...Bronstein the philosopher subjugated Bronstein the chess player, and he increasingly found himself at odds with himself.'* If a picture paints a thousand words, equally Sosonko's words paint a fascinating picture of a complex and, in many ways, troubled man.

If there is a sense of respectful distance between author and subject in this chapter (Bronstein was nearly twenty years older than Sosonko), then Sosonko's chronicling of Tal is much more intimate.

The two were good friends, much closer in age, and it shows in both Sosonko's insights and the way in which he handles often delicate subject matter. He does an impressively sensitive job of discussing Tal's many peccadillos, not papering over the chain-smoking, alcoholic, womanising drug addict which lay behind the unique chess genius. In lesser, hagiographic, hands it would have been tempting to skirt these issues, but Sosonko tackles them head-on:

'...his heart could be occupied with several objects of his affection at the same time. Besides his official wives, one could speak of (seven names) and many, many others.'

'I've gone into this subject in such detail because alcohol and drugs played a colossal role in his life, destroying what even without them would have been a great player's fragile physical shell.'

Far from condemning him, Sosonko saw in Tal many of the characteristics shared by great artists in other fields such as Rubinstein, Vysotsky and Mandel-

stam. As he notes elsewhere in the book, *'If under an authoritarian regime it is impossible to create philosophical systems, to follow fashion trends in art, write poetry and novels as you like and about what you want, people show their talents in the areas accessible to them. Then brilliant musical performers, dancers and ballerinas appear. Great athletes and outstanding chess players.'*

Wonderful stuff. You really have to read these chapters, almost mini-books in their own right, for yourself to get the full flavour of the coverage.

Amongst this wealth of material there is, of course, lots of great trivia, e.g. which GM

- cried when he learnt of Fischer's death
- only turned professional at the age of 44
- played in goals for his university football team
- assaulted a policeman during a drunken brawl at a USSR championship
- had never played his oppo-

nent before their world championship match

- had to climb a ladder to get in through a window when he locked himself out
- channelled his inner Fawlty by making horns and bleating noises to try to explain 'mutton' to a waiter
- and who represented the USSR at chess and the USA at bridge?

Plus lots of anecdotes. Let this one serve for the many, Kholmov on preparing for his game v Fischer at Havana 1965 (the tournament where Fischer played by tel-ex from New York):

'The bar in the hotel was open all night and I was drinking Bacardi as you do. This rum is marvellous in Cuba. It was already very late when Smyslov came looking for me. Let's go, Ratmir, he says, I'll show you a variation that you can play against Fischer tomorrow. We went up to Smyslov's room and he showed me a new idea in the Chigorin Variation of the Spanish, but I was so drunk that

Vasily Vasilievich was sure I wouldn't remember anything.'

But remember he did, and won a great game. A little different from today's methods!

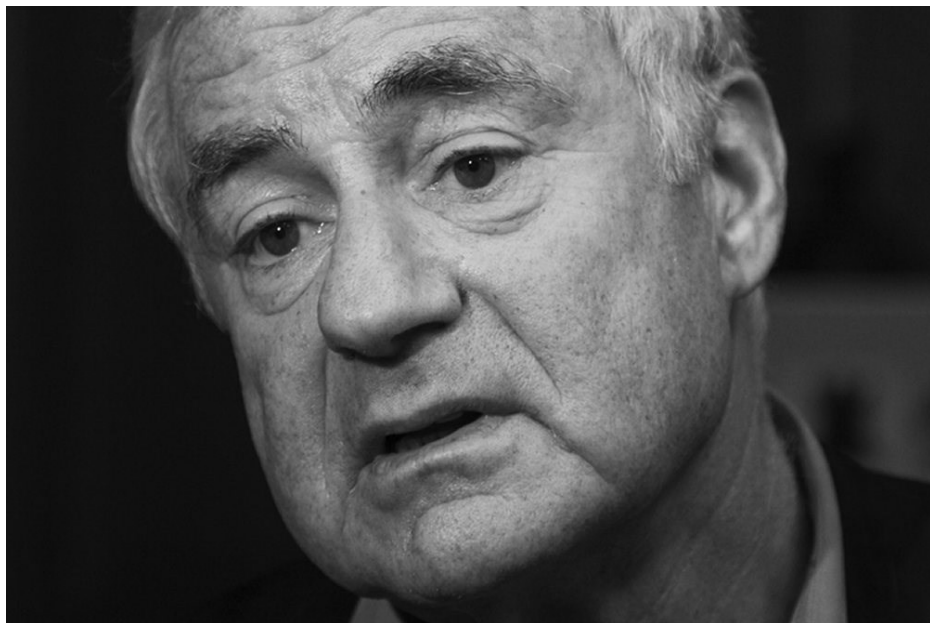
Given that his work is about chess in the Soviet Union, it is impossible for Sosonko to body swerve the skulduggery which was part and parcel of chess in that now-defunct country. It is hard to convey the scale of dodgy practices which went on, not just in selection procedures, but in game-rigging, deciding the winner in advance etc. etc. In fact not only were results fixed, but whole games would be concocted, to be acted out at the board with a straight face the next day. Fischer was right; it was cheating. There are two major tournaments that you'll never look at again in the same way. I'm not telling you which ones, you'll have to find out for yourself.

Connections also counted; it was helpful to have a sponsor or patron. Players who had friends in high places, e.g. in government or the KGB, rarely had any problems. And if you want to see what book

reviews could be like back in the USSR, check out *'The Panov Attack'*. A wee bit different from this sort of stuff!

Material like this could easily have degenerated into tabloid/reality schlock, but Sosonko is comfortable handling language. He knows how to structure and pace his work and how to vary his style to match the mood or subject matter; depending on context he skilfully and effortlessly weaves strands like philosophy, humour, reportage and memoir into an engrossing whole.

His writing can be both simple and complex, but is never less than compelling. I doubt if anyone could read *'The heart of a soothsayer'* about the Yakut IM Sergey Nikolaev, beaten to death by a racist gang in Moscow in 2007, and not be moved. Or take this passage, from the chapter on Tartakower: *'And besides the role of hero or failure in the very short, one and only life that is given to us, there's something a little more frightening: just living, living day after day, knowing in advance how any life will end.'* High quality prose, with echoes of the classical Russian literary tradition.



To be able to write you need to have read, and Sosonko has certainly read. Amongst his references we find, for example, Aristotle, Chekhov, Solon, Nabokov, Zweig, Maugham, Pasternak, Gide and Stevenson. This is far from an ordinary chess book, this is literature.

It is strange that three of the greatest chess writers of recent times – Donner, Timman and Sosonko – are all Dutch GMs.

To paraphrase Donner, they started out as chess players who wrote and finished up as writers who played chess. It's hard to think of any other country where our game has thrown up such literary talent.

As a chronicler of people and times, Sosonko is peerless. You really want to spend some quality time with his work.

Ian Marks.



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The [Calendar](#) is updated regularly and contains details of all forthcoming events and detailed information of how to sign up to play.

The [online rating system](#) has regular updates and allows members to check their rating progress, check links to event crosstables and view several years of previous data.

[FIDE ratings](#) are updated on the 1st of every month and give players information on their latest world ranking.

The [Chess Scotland 100 Club](#) is a lottery that anyone (over 16) is welcome to join. Half the cash collected every month is returned as prizes, the rest goes into general fund raising for the association.

The [Grand Prix Leaderboards](#) and rules can be viewed here while the [Giant-killing](#) lists are here.

...and finally, **Alan McGowan's** excellent history archive can be found [here](#).

For more information about CS please feel free to **contact** the relevant officers listed [here](#).