Valentina Gunina pulls off shock victory at the London Chess Classic Super Rapidplay

London Chess Classic success for Wesley So and Nigel Short
Hastings - Shaun Press enjoyed his first visit to the famous congress
The Match - Jonathan Speelman reflects on Carlsen-Karjakin
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Nowadays happy domiciled in Minnetonka, Minnesota with his adoptive family, 23-year-old Wesley So arrived at the London Chess Classic in the form of his life. So has been a grandmaster for 9 years, but his recent rapid rise has unsurprisingly not gone unnoticed by his colleagues.

As Vladimir Kramnik acknowledged during the Classic, “He improved enormously this year. He was already for a while a top player, but this year he’s playing maybe the best chess in the world in fact.” High praise, indeed, as the Russian’s further, “I feel that he is going to be a very serious challenger for Magnus in the years to come. He’s really strong now.”

So knew that even if his only remaining Grand Chess Tour rival, Hikaru Nakamura, was to triumph at Olympia, if he could finish fourth the 2016 Tour would be his. Of course, he no doubt wanted to do much better than a fourth-placed finish, but his usual combination of humbleness and modesty prevented him from saying it.

The 8th London Chess Classic was playing host to the final leg of the Grand Chess Tour (GCT) for a second time and as such hoped that, especially in the absence of the recuperating post-New York Magnus Carlsen, the tournament would be played out to a backdrop of Nakamura and So competing for the GCT glory. Unfortunately the Americans were drawn to play not in the final round, but in the very opening one which fell on a birthday Hikaru Nakamura is unlikely ever to remember in a positive guise.

H.Nakamura-W.So
Round 1
Grünefeld Defence
1 d4 ��f6 2 c4 g6 3 ��c3
The Grünefeld may have come as a surprise to Nakamura, but there is no reason whatsoever why Black should have to play the QGD when he’s happy to play. Moreover, the Grünefeld has long been part of So’s repertoire. He even wheeled it out against the Grand Chess Tour leader dominated the London Chess Classic

Sotastic!

Eljanov at Wijk and in the Ultimate Moves contest against Nakamura himself. There a much sharper line was discussed and after 3 f3 d5 4 cxd5 ��xd5 5 e4 ��b6 6 ��c3 ��g7 7 ��e3 0-0 8 ��d2 ��c6 9 0-0-0 ��d6 10 ��b5 ��d7 11 ��b1 ��d8 12 d5 a6 13 ��c3 ��e8 14 ��c1 ��a5 15 h4 White had already sounded the charge, going on to prevail in Nakamura-So, St. Louis (blitz) 2016.

3...d5 4 cxd5 ��xd5 5 e4 ��xc3 6 ��xc3 ��g7 7 ��e3 c5 8 ��e1 0-0 9 ��d2

Anatoly Karpov used to like such systems as White, keeping the central situation fully under control. Now Black’s main move by far is 9...��a5, after which the queens may well be traded, but So was to prefer something much less common, if a sub-variation employed on occasion by Anand, Svidler and Vachier-Lagrave.

9...��e5? 10 d5
This feels critical and was played pretty quickly. Instead, 10 ��xe5 ��xd2+ 11 ��xd2 ��d8+ 12 ��c2 ��d7 13 f4 ��c6 saw Black regaining his pawn in Svidler-Vachier-
One might have imagined that after his second world championship defeat against Magnus Carlsen at the end of 2014 that Viswanathan Anand might have slipped gently into a comfortable retirement from elite-level events, perhaps playing lucrative league games, exhibition matches and holiday tournaments in attractive locations. Not a bit of it. The veteran Indian, just turned 47 years old, has once again found his feet at the chessboard.

Highlights of 2016 include second in the Zurich Challenge blitz, then first in the rapid; joint second in the terrifically tight Candidates tournament; first in the Leon knock-out tournament; joint second at the Sinquefield Cup; first in the St. Louis Showdown rapid and blitz event – ahead of Caruana, Nakamura and Topalov.

The London Chess Classic – without Magnus Carlsen, but arguably one of the strongest tournaments of the year – was a severe test, but Vishy played with enterprise and experience, finishing with a respectable 5/9.

It’s quite clear that Anand is still preparing hard behind the scenes.

Anand’s next came as a complete surprise to Wesley So and gave the Indian superstar an easy draw.

10...\texttt{axb3!} 11 \texttt{Bxc3} \texttt{b6} 12 \texttt{Bxd6} \texttt{cxd6} 13 \texttt{Bc4} 0-0 14 0-0 \texttt{Ba7} 15 \texttt{Be2} \texttt{Bb6} 16 \texttt{Af1} \texttt{Bc8} 17 \texttt{Wb3} \texttt{Bxf3} 18 \texttt{Bxf3}

Anand’s next came as a complete surprise to Wesley So and gave the Indian superstar an easy draw.

born back on the 11th December 1969, Vishy Anand’s many achievements include: World Junior Champion 1987, FIDE World Champion 2000-2002, World Champion 2007-2013, World Rapid Champion 2003, and being rated no.1 in the world for 21 months. We shouldn’t forget too that early in his career Vishy was a regular participant in English tournaments.
Finally - to Hastings!

Australian arbiter Shaun Press shares his impressions on his first visit to the famous Hastings Congress

For someone whose chess career started (and continues) on the other side of the world, the Hastings International Chess Congress was one of those special events that one day I had hoped to get to. Starting with the historic 1895 Congress, 'Hastings', as it simply known as, has attracted almost all of the world's great players during its run of 92 tournaments. As a comparison, Australia's largest event, the O2C Doeberl Cup, has only been running for 54 years.

Seeing the event in person also confirmed how significant it is for the English chess community. While previously designed to match the world's best against the UK's best, it is now part of the British chess Christmas holiday tradition, and many players arrived to be greeted almost like family, paying their annual visit to 'home'.

The 2016/17 Hastings International Congress attracted a strong international field, to go with the large English contingent who hoped to achieve the first home victory since Mark Hebden's equal first in 2013/14. Indian GMs Deep Sengupta (winner in 2010/11) and Murali Karthikeyan seeded in the top five. The strong contingent of Indian players, with fellow IMs looking for a chance at a GM norm.

Round 1

Jovica Radovanovic. It was only GM Deep Sengupta of the top four who scored a full point, after pushing too hard for a win, while second seed GM Alexandr Fier drew with Serbian FM Jovica Radovanovic. It was only GM Deep Sengupta of the top four who scored a full point, allowing it to both attack and defend at the same time.

Rounds 1-3

Normally the first three rounds are where the leading players establish themselves, a few hopefuls score the odd upset, and the rest try and get their expected losses out of the way. In Hastings almost none of this happened as expected.

As Hastings uses Accelerated Pairings (Baku System), the top seeds found they were facing stronger opponents than usual. As a result the top four boards saw plenty of hard chess, and in the end two and a half upsets.

Top seed S.P. Sethuraman lost to Danish FM Jasper Thybo in a game that was later judged by the tournament's top seed GM Alexandr Fier. IM Richard Bates of Hungary lost to IM Richard Bates after pushing too hard for a win, while second seed GM Alexandr Fier drew with Serbian FM Jovica Radovanovic.

There was also a large group of strong Danish players, with GM Allan Stig Rasmussen and a couple of young Australian GMs looking for a chance at a GM norm.

1 d4 f5 2 d4 f4

The London System is less of a surprise these days, and it is now common at the top level.

2...g6 3 c3 d5 4 e3 g7 5 h4

An aggressive choice by the tournament's top seed.

5...c6 6 e2 h5

This stops the action down the h-file, but does surrender the g5-square to White. Black is now effectively playing a Gurgenidze Caro-Kann against White's set-up.

Round 2

Top seed S.P. Sethuraman lost to Danish FM Jasper Thybo in a game that was later judged dynamically equal, if tactically messy, and Black is the only player with worries about his king safety.

White decides to smash open the kingside before the queenside attack gets going.

16...hxg4 17 h5 gxh5 18 a3 f5 with a similar position to what was played in the game.

19 g4

White to move, Black's desire to swap queens. 19...hxg4 20 hxg4 f5 21 g5! is dynamically equal, if tactically messy, and Black is the only player with worries about his king safety.

Centralising the queen is a powerful idea, allowing it to both attack and defend at the same time.

White's attack has stalled, and the initiative has shifted to Black.

White to move, Black now continues his attack.
Signs of Life in London

Unlike in the recent world championship match, attacking chess and the Open Sicilian were very much alive and well at the London Chess Classic

The 2014 London Chess Classic, won by Vishy Anand, featured just five decisive games from its 15 encounters, which also included some five Berlins. Fast forward a year to when the Classic first became the final event in the Grand Chess Tour and we find that 10 games from 45 were decisive, while there were a staggering 13 Berlins (incidentally, in which on some seven occasions White went in for the main line – 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4). Meanwhile of those eight decisive games in 2015, three arose from the six Open Sicilians (an opening seemingly unknown a year earlier) which were seen.

Not such exciting statistics you might be thinking and then we could mention the recent world championship match... However, whether it was a reaction to events between Magnus and Sergey or because only two players began the 2016 Classic with a chance of Tour success, the tournament was pretty bloodthirsty to the delight of the crowd. Round 1 saw three decisive games and while Giri against Vachier-Lagrave was a draw, it was Giri, not the Frenchman, who was on the black side of a Najdorf. The very next day saw a second Najdorf and one in which Vishy Anand arrived well prepared with an unusual idea.

V.Anand-M.Vachier Lagrave
Round 2
Sicilian Najdorf
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 h3

Vladimir Kramnik might have tried 6 g5 to down no less an adversary than Boris Gelfand at the Tal Memorial, but in London he preferred a move more in keeping with his style, 6 g3. After 6...e5 7 Qde2 a6 8 Qg2 h5? 9 Qg5 Qd7 10 Qd2 Qe7 11 a4 Qc5 12 0-0 Qf8 13 Qxf6 Qxf6 14 Qd1 Qe7 15 Qd5 h4 16 Qc3 White's grip on the ever important d5-square gave him a pleasant pull in Kramnik-Giri.

6...e5 Later in the tournament Anand too had to face Giri and quite a stiff challenge here in the shape of 6...e5 7 g4 h5 8 g5 Qd7 9 h4 b5 10 a3 Qb7 11 a3 Qc6. One's gut feeling is that Black cannot be doing badly with such straightforward development, although 12 Qg2 0-0 13 0-0-0 Qc5!? did feel a little strange, blocking the c-file. However, that was not all that was strange about Anand-Giri where after 14 f3 Qb8 15 g1 (as ever, 15 Qb1 can hardly be a bad move and a decent case might be made too for 15 Qc6?!) 15...Qc7 16 b4!? (extremely ambitious; if White did want to stab forwards so on the queenside, 16 Qc6 Qxc6 17 h5 a5 18 b4 was likely a better way of doing things) 16...Qd7?

7...Qe6 8 f4 Qb7

One of Anand's seconds was to show the principled Najdorf break, but it just doesn't quite cut the mustard here. As such, it seems that Black should prefer 11...Qxc3!
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Grandmaster Michael Roiz has represented Israel many times. As well as his numerous tournament victories, he is an Olympiad Silver Medallist and has been ranked in the world’s top 40. In recent years he has focused more on seconding, helping elite grandmasters in top tournaments, the Candidates and even a World Championship match.

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A decisive factor here is the completely redesigned evaluation function, which has been returned to better take king safety and piece play into account. Houdini's unique playing style is the result of a cunning combination of aggressive playing ideas and healthy positional and strategic understanding. What makes playing and analysing with Houdini 5 particularly exciting is the sheer plethora of ideas it comes up with - the program has all the hallmarks of unbridled creativity. Where other engines see no way to make progress, or head towards a draw, not infrequently, Houdini conjures up hidden and surprising resources!

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