ALL THE ACTION FROM
TATA STEEL MASTERS
AND GIBRALTAR

PLUS AN EXCLUSIVE
ANNOTATION FROM CURRENT
BRITISH CHAMPION
GAWAIN JONES

The inside story on this year’s Gibraltar Festival from John Saunders
Yochanan Afek reports back from Wijk aan Zee where Magnus again triumphed
Mark Uniacke on HIARCS’ recent triumph and developments in computer chess
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Printed in the UK by The Magazine Printing Company using only paper from FSC/PEFC suppliers www.magprint.co.uk
Born: 13th Nov. 1978, Stockton-on-Tees.
Place of residence: Northampton.
Occupation: Inclusive Learning and Teaching Lead (King’s College, London).

Enjoyable? Yes, being based in an academic development department, tasked to improve the quality of teaching across the college.

And home life? Yes, all good. Northampton’s location enables me to play in multiple leagues, including Leamington, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and the London leagues.

But sometimes good to escape to: Mainly to Germany, where I speak the language and love the culture as well as the history and food of such wonderful places as Berlin and Cologne.

Sports played or followed: Play cricket, although principally for fitness, rather than true competitiveness. Follow ‘Boro in football, although despair at their fluctuating performances.

A favourite novel? Pillars Of the Earth by Ken Follett.

Piece of music? Varied, but I enjoyed the Indie/Britpop times of the mid-90’s.

Film or TV series? I don’t really bother with either.

The best three chess books: Capablanca’s Chess Fundamentals, Fischer’s My 60 Memorable Games and Nimzowitsch’s My System.

Is FIDE doing a good job? I don’t have many dealings with the authorities. One area that does need to be tightened up is the ‘rules’ regarding visually impaired players: how they announce moves (currently it’s all in German); the types of equipment they can use, including types of digital talking clocks; and more importantly, on how classification of sight impairment is done. For example, visual impairment in one country is not the equivalent in another. That universal benchmarking toolkit needs to be developed.

Or your National Federation? We don’t see much from the ECF. As with FIDE, there should be better collaboration amongst the federations to ensure conformity and transparency, such as by the ECF switching to an ELO rating system.

Any advice for either? Start talking with one another and work collaboratively.

What’s the best thing about playing chess? Mentally, it’s extremely stimulating. Even whilst travelling, commuting to places, your thoughts can be occupied with variations, experiences, games gone by, etc, that never-ending fascination with the infinite amount of possibilities and opportunities in a single game.

And the worst? In my opinion, there’s a certain amount of injustice when ‘swindles’ or undeserved victories occur and there is no graciousness displayed by an opponent. Often, there’s a boastful, pleased attitude portrayed by players who have won in such a fashion and no acknowledgement of the fortune in their victory.

Your best move? I have a number of memorable games, but none of them contain ‘spectacular’ moves. An amusing move did, however, appear in a cup match last season.

M. Meadows-C. Ross
Kettering A vs Chess Mates A 2017
Sicilian Taimanov
1 e4 c5 2 d3 f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 cxd4 c6 5 c3 wC7 6 e3 a6 7 wF3 a3!? An amazing resource. After 8 0-0-0 Ñe5 9 Ñg3 Ñx3 10 bxa3 Ñg6 the position was very unbalanced and Black went on to win.

But less memorable than your worst move? 49 Ña8+ when I announced mate – only for it not to be mate after all! My opponent only had seconds left and the worst thing was that it was not a cheap check or spite check to gain seconds. I played the move thinking that there was a supporting knight on b6. Black lost on time shortly afterwards, clinching victory in the match for Daventry.


Can chess make one happy? Indeed! Chess needs to be taken in the correct spirit. Due to the diversity of the chess community, this does not always mean that opponents’ conduct and behaviour is always acceptable, though. This is an occupational hazard, but needs to be challenged whenever it appears.

A tip please for the club player: It is important that normal club players interact with the stronger members of their club. The stronger players should be made accountable to support the development of the less able, going through their games and answering their many questions.

www.chess.co.uk
The Pivotal Encounter for HIARCS

After six rounds Komodo led HIARCS by half a point, with both engines at least a point clear of the rest of the field. In this last round encounter HIARCS X (an experimental version of a future HIARCS 15 engine) needed victory in order to win the tournament. The engines did not back away from a fiery confrontation which led to a very exciting game.

HIARCS-Komodo
CSVN Programmer Tournament, Leiden 2017
Sicilian Najdorf

1 e4 c5 2 d3 f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 exd4 f6
5 c3 a6 6 g5 e6 7 f4

HIARCS X was ready to play the very sharp Poisoned Pawn variation.

7...e7 8 f3 w7 9 0-0-0 d7 10 g4
b5 11 xf6 xef6 12 g5 d7 13 f5 0-0
14 g1

14...e5!

An unusual choice. The HIARCS Chess Explorer online Human Reference book has 14...e5 as played twice and 14...b4 as played 68 times. Surprisingly the ChessBase live book only has 10 games for 14...b4 14...e5 has been played before with success in 2013, but not at the highest level. 14...b4 is the most common response when 15 cxe2 e5 16 f6 exd4 17 fxe7 fxe7 18 dxe4 e5 19 f4 is a little better for White. 15 wh5

15 g3 is the more common variation and has a good statistical record in computer play according to the HIARCS tournament book. 15...b4?!

From a human and computer theory perspective this is a novelty, but it is not a good one. While...b4 is common in some similar variations, here Black does not have time for it as it encourages the white knight to divert to a better square.

Instead, 15...g6 16 wh6 e8 17 g3 f8 18 wh4 wdb was seen in Barbosa-Dao Thien Ha, Jakarta 2013, when 19 q2 d7 20 cxe2 e8 21 f4 would have preserved an edge. 16 cxe2 b7

That 16...g6? fails here shows 15...b4? was a mistake: 17 wh6 e8 18 f4 and the knight is eying up entry into the attack via e6 or h5 when Black’s position is close to collapse. White threatens 19 fxg6 hgx6 (or 19...fxg6 20 dxe6 fxe6 21 cxe6) 20 c75 and also finds himself winning after 18...f8 19 wh4 b7 20 fxe6 fxh5 21 h5 gxh5 22 wh4 e4. 17 f6

With the rook on f8, the bishop cannot go to the natural defensive square of f8.

Black will now use the g7-pawn as defensive cover, while HIARCS X assessed that pawn as a long-term advantage restricting Black’s options. White certainly has a significant advantage.

19 g3 g6 20 6 a5 21 h4 c8 22 e2 e7

Black also finds himself on the defensive after 22...fxg7 23 h6+ h8 24 gxf1 e7 25 h5.

23 e1

Prophylaxis, but 23 gxf1 e5 24 g4 wxg7 25 f3 e5 26 f4 dxf3 27 dxf3 e5 28 hxd6 exf4 29 dxf4 leaves White in the driving seat too.

23...e5 24 d5 f4

Komodo had a final choice here to either capture the g7-pawn or keep using it as a defensive barrier. 24...fxg7 25 h5 e5 26 f4 also maintains some advantage for White.

25 h5

Black was able to maintain a draw.
Black may feel the worst is over now the queens are off the board, but the g7-pawn is a pain for Black to deal with and White still has the initiative.

Many top engines misevaluate this position as close to level, not appreciating the danger in the position for Black. White still has some very deep threats based around the difficult position of the trapped black rook and that the black king is unable to escape. If

White can penetrate with the knight or rooks, that will decide the game.

HIARCS chooses to cement the g7-pawn in place. The black king is safe for now, but its long-term prospects for leaving g8/h7 are rather limited.

The dust has settled with White having a long-term edge.

HIARCS X elects to offer a pawn to trap the black rook. It takes time for even top engines to see the long-term threats from White with a trapped black rook and a king locked on g8 and h7.

Instead, 36...a4 is the move most engines prefer when 36...a3 37 b3 retains a clear advantage.

Many top engines misevaluate this position as close to level, not appreciating the danger in the position for Black. White still has some very deep threats based around the difficult position of the trapped black rook and that the black king is unable to escape. If

HIARCS and Komodo disagreed significantly here on their assessments, with Komodo thinking it was close to equal while HIARCS thought White still had a significant advantage.

29...exf6 30 gxf6 d5

The dust has settled with White having a long-term edge.

HARCS X elects to offer a pawn to trap the black rook. It takes time for even top engines to see the long-term threats from White with a trapped black rook and a king locked on g8 and h7.

Instead, 36...a4 is the move most engines prefer when 36...a3 37 b3 retains a clear advantage.

56...d4? This move looks highly logical, but misses a key opportunity and one which computers are still poor at – spotting blockades and fortresses.

56...e2! looks like the best chance to create a fortress: for example, 57 ...ex2 58 ...d2 b3+ 59 ...c3 ...e2 60 ...xd5 ...c5 61 ...xc5 ...e6 and Black will escape with a draw.

With this move HIARCS X announced mate in 31.

A Paradigm Shift

The recent news of DeepMind’s AlphaZero and its incredible achievement to self-learn chess through self-play from only the knowledge of the rules of chess and perform at the very highest levels is a truly astonishing milestone in Artificial Intelligence. It was made all the more significant because it comes from using a completely different domain independent approach to conventional chess engines. A true paradigm shift.

The strong impression from AlphaZero’s play is one of deep understanding of the long-term implications of piece placement and an ability to suffocate a conventional chess engine’s mobility. However, objectively from a chess perspective there remain some questions about how strong AlphaZero truly is compared to the strongest conventional chess engines. It won a final 100-game match 64-36 (+28 -0 =72) for a +100 Elo performance, yet this was against a restricted Stockfish 8 which despite running 64 threads, only had a total of 1GB hash, no opening book and no endgame tablebases.

I hope AlphaZero does not go the way of Deep Blue and instead rises to the challenge to demonstrate its superiority in open competition. It would be interesting to see it compete in the World Computer Chess Championship in Stockholm in July where it can play against the strongest chess engines outside the laboratory.

As part of the HIARCS book subscription, the HIARCS team include all the latest theory from the highest levels of human and computer play in their online Tournament book. So, of course, it was natural to include the 10 published AlphaZero-Stockfish games. Every position included in the HIARCS books was analysed by HIARCS engines running on a cluster. For these games each position was given an average of two hours of analysis, the analysis being performed from the end of the middlegame backwards as this gives a much better understanding of earlier positions. The results have been very revealing and go into deciding the playability and annotation of moves in the Tournament book which are now available to see in the online HIARCS books.

Ed. – HIARCS is available for either MAC or PC from Chess & Bridge. The single-processor version is available for just £40 and the multi-processor Deep HIARCS Chess Explorer is available for the special price of £80.
A Lovely Attack

Dan Bisby is always a dangerous opponent, as Jonathan Speelman discovered

The stars of Cheddleton and Guildford continue to shine at the 4NCL, as we’ll see more of next month, but arguably the game of the season so far belongs to FM Dan Bisby.

14...e4!
Extremely comfortable for Black.

J.Speelman-D.Bisby
Wood Green vs Cambridge
Torre Attack

1...e4

10...e8
Bisby calmly prepares Black’s main break and even White’s next proves insufficient to halt it.

11...f4 Qh5 12 h2 e5 13 b5

The critical test. Otherwise, 13 dxe5 Qxe5 14 Qxe5 Qxe5 15 Qxe5 Qxe5 16 Qf3 Qxe8 17 Qe2 would be rather dull and extremely comfortable for Black.

13...e4!

True to his style, Bisby continues to play the most active and critical moves.

14 Qe1

A little submissive, but one certainly can’t blame Speelman for not wanting to become embroiled in 14 Qe5 Qxe5 15 Qxe8 Qf3+ 16 gx f3 Qxe8 when Black enjoys promising play for the exchange. This was actually once seen in a game and after 17fxe4 dxe4 18 Qd1 Qc8 19 f3 Qxh3 (Levitina-Tsodikova, Parsippany 1996) 20 Qf2 Qh6 Black’s compensation very much persists.

14...Qh6 15 a4

Finally White’s queenside play is under way and a race-type situation quickly evolves.

15...a6 16 Qe2 Qf8 17 a5 Qe6 18 axb6 Qxb6 19 Qc2

White has fought his way back into the game and Black’s next is slightly optimistic.

19...h5? 20 Wa2

Consistent, but 20 dxc5 Qxc5 21 b4 would have been strong, as 21...Qd3 22 Qd4 and 21...Qe6 22 c4 d4 23 exd4 Qxd4 24 Qxd4 Qxd4 25 Qb3 are nothing to fear.

20...Qxd4 21 cxd4 a5

It’s useful for Black to prevent both b2-b4 and Qa5. Speelman now regroups well.

22 Qb1! Qf8 23 Qc3 Qd6 24 Qxd6 Qxd6 25 Qfc1 Qg7 26 Qa3 Qh8

Back to the attack and I dare say that Bisby already had in mind the sacrifice we’ll shortly see him launch, but objectively 26...Qc6? 27 Qab5 Qd7 might have been a better set-up.

27 Qab5 Qbb8 28 Wa3

With hindsight, Speelman might well have preferred 28 Qa4!, intending to meet 28...Qa6 with 29 Qc5, and if 29...Qd4 30 Qxe6+ Qxe6 31 hxg4 hxg4 32 Qc7 when White wins. Instead, Black might restrict White to just a pull with 28...Qa6 29 Qb3 Qd6 28...Qa6! 29 Qa4 Qg4!!

A stunning blow and one which guarantees Black at least a draw.

30 hxg4

After 30 g3 Qg5 White has nothing better than taking on g4 after all.

30...Qxg4 31 Qg3

The best defence. 31 Qxg4 Wh2+ 32 Qf1 Qg5 33 Qe2 Wh6 followed by ...Wh4 gives Black a crushing attack for the piece.

31...Qg5 32 Qxg4?

Jon Speelman’s only mistake of the game. 32 Qe7 Wh6 33 Qc7! was necessary when Black doesn’t seem to have anything better than 33...Qh3+ (33...Whg8? 34 Wh2 and Wh1
the headline grandmaster event of a 9-round all-play-all at traditional time limits. With 19 draws in the first 20 games, this was simply not good box office and on Tuesday 5th December, organiser Malcolm Pein delivered a veiled reprimand to the players. I have long supported the 3-1 system (3 points for a win, one for a draw), as a way of incentivising players to try harder for a win, but this has not gone down well with the players themselves, many of whom bitterly resented it. Well, now they have lost their tournament altogether, since next year’s event will be smaller and will mix classical, rapid and blitz time limits.

I will not rehash the arguments for 3-1, but will instead make a revised suggestion, based on a debate I had with Stuart Reuben, who suggested five points for a win and two for a draw. The latest idea can thus be regarded either as Basman mark II or Reuben Superplus.

One of Ray Keene’s objections to 3-1, dating back to the 70s, hinged around his argument that, “What is better, a faultlessly played draw, or a decisive result after several blunders?” But this argument could also be used in the case of the player who loses. Often you play a fine game, but your opponent’s play is even better. However, you lose and get nothing.

So my new suggestion is five points for a win, two points for a draw, one point for a loss and zero only for a player who does not turn up. This system would be less drastic than 3-1 and would also recognise the effort, educational and sporting value of a game of chess regardless of result. This factor is also tacitly recognised by the FIDE grading system. I encouraged some junior players to analyse the subtle effects on 5-2-1 upon such events as the British Chess Championship or the recent London Classic to see how the positions might be affected.

One thing stands out from preliminary analysis. Decisive results are incentivised and the 5-2-1 system has a built in tie-breaker effect. In fact this year’s British Championship would have been won outright by David Howell rather than resulting in a four-way tie which necessitated a play-off. The other score groups likewise would have been broken up.

Under a 5, 2, 1 scoring system, Howell would have triumphed with 35/45, finishing two points ahead of all of Jones, McShane and Hanley. According to the new system we would have had a clear winner and thus no necessity for play-offs. There are also other remarkable effects, including many instances when a player with considerably more wins and losses, actually moves ahead of players with a higher score under the classical system. This scoring system would have the effect of nudging more players to go for wins with less concern about the damaging effect of losses since you still score something when you lose.

It also brings the scoring system more in line with the grading system. In the grading system you do not score ‘0’ when you lose; you get your opponent’s grade minus 50, and there is a quantitative difference between losing to a strong player as opposed to a weak player.

More recently, in the 2017 London Chess Classic, Fabiano Caruana and Ian Nepomniachtchi both finished on +3 =6 -0 as they tied for first. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Wesley So and Magnus Carlsen all shared third place, but while Vachier-Lagrave and So made +1 =8 -0, Carlsen scored +2 =6 -1, so under a 5, 2, 1 system would leap ahead and into outright third. We can imagine that if this tournament were played again, scored according to the 5, 2, 1 system, there would be a certain ‘nudge factor’, which could encourage players to take more risks to win even at the slower time limit.

Michael Basman, Surbiton, Surrey
Now I switch from the static to the dynamic, like the universal Alekhine.

25...g5? 26 d3!

Around this point, my team captain asked me if I would be able to hold a draw. He seemed flabbergasted when I told him, “Sure, but I’d rather push for a win.”

26...e6 27 dxc7

Just observe how the knights act like a virus afflicting poor Black.

27...e7 28 g3 b7 29 d5 g7? 30 d6+

30...a3 a6 31 d6+ a7 32 gxf4 gxf4

33 b3 is the computer’s method.

30...b8 31 f5 g6 32 d7

32...h5?

32...f6 simply had to be tried.

33 gxf4 gxf4 34 d7 f6 35 c6+ c8 36 dxe7 1-0

The presence of the knight on c6 ensures there won’t be any perpetual and mate follows shortly.

We wake up with alarm clocks, check our phones, take our cars to work, fill up the coffee machine... But what if we were to reverse this interpretation; has a world of objects simply enslaved us without us noticing? And now it is happening with the game of chess.

Slavoj Zizek rightly said, “It is when you try to escape ideology into your dreams, actually this is when you enter ideology”. So I ask you, if you had to choose between these two wins, which would you choose, computer perfection or human imperfection? This is John Connor and if you’re reading this, you are the revolution...
BELFAST — The Good Shepherd Centre hosted the Ulster Team Rapidplay Championships on February 3rd. The event attracted some 72 players with Strand I (Gabor Horvath, Nikhil Joshi, David Hill, Ross Harris, Modestas Razbadauskas and Danil Zelenchuk) claiming the top honours. Strand amassed 19½/25, thanks to 4/5 from Horvath and 4/4 from Joshi, which left them some four and a half points ahead of Muldoons, with Ballynafeigh back in third. Meanwhile Bangor (Alan McConnell, Brendan Jamison, Sam Moore, Gary Johnston and Andy Boal) won the Intermediate section, while victory in the Junior went to Strand III (Adam Rushe, Caran Rowan, Michael Wong, James Wong and Louie McConkey).

BRAMLEY — Chess is often seen as a male-dominated game, but that certainly wasn’t the case at St Catherine’s School in Bramley on 14th January, where the Girls’ Southern Semi-Final of the National Schools Chess Championship attracted some 87 three-player teams, so 261 players in total. We hope that many of these young players will remain active within the game, while kudos is certainly due to the organisers, as well as to Andrew Martin and the other driving forces behind the National Schools Chess Championship. On the board in Surrey, North London Collegiate triumphed in the Under-19 section, with Guildford High Schools Chess Championship. On the board in Yorkshire, North London Collegiate triumphed in the Under-19 section.

CLEVEDON — The Somerset New Year Congress took place by the sea just outside Bristol (13-14 January).

Major 1-2 Chris Timmins (Bristol), Timothy Woodward (Trowbridge) 4, 3-6 Andrew Borkowski (Bristol), Martyn Harris (Newcastle-under-Lyme), Mark Potter (Dorchester), Oliver Stubbs (Downend) 3½. Intermediate 1-3 Robert Parsons (Hatch End), Stephen Williams (Cwmbran), Rich Wilsher (Newport) 3½. Minor 1-2 Jason Madden (Leamington), Graham Mill-Wilson (Yate) 4, 3-6 Timothy Allen (Battersea), Roy Ludlow (Trowbridge), Philip Owen (Chippenden), Chris Smith (Bristol) 3½.

FRODSHAM — Mike Surtees of ‘revolutionary FRODSHAM Minor Wiltshir (Rushall) 4.

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Stephen Ennis 4½, 3–5 Tamal Matial (both Cowley), Zulfii Heydon (Oxford), Duncan Clarke (Aylesbury) 4.

LONDON – Adam Raoof continues to dominate the organisation of chess events in the capital. His latest Hampstead U2200 Congress (20–21 January) saw Bao Nghia Dong (Loughborough) and Nicholas Tavoularis (Middlesex) tie for first on 4½/5. That score was matched by both Graeme Jenkins (Muswell Hill) and Anders Lundback (Athenaeum) in the U1900 section, while Ronan Kelly (Metropolitan, London) triumphed with the very same score in the Under-135, finishing half a point ahead of Robert Cassen (Middlesex) and Tim Valentine (Battersea).

Meanwhile the Muswell Hill Rapidplay of January 24th, attracted not just two grandmasters, but also saw a rare appearance from IM David Levy. Alexander Cherniaev (Hackney) triumphed with 5½/6 in the Open to edge out Bogdan Lalic (Wood Green), while Jamie Sparrow (Muswell Hill) won the Minor ahead of David Everitt (Haywards Heath).

Russian Grandmaster Cherniaev did even better in the Golders Green Rapidplay, making 100% on February 10th.

Open: 1 Alexander Cherniaev (Hackney) 6/6, 2 Bao Nghia Dong (Loughborough) 5, 3–6 Michael Fernandez (Southampton), Fedorco Rocco (Hendon), Richard Cannon (UNATS, London), Wolfgang Jekel (Germany) 4.

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Meanwhile the Muswell Hill Rapidplay of January 24th, attracted not just two grandmasters, but also saw a rare appearance from IM David Levy. Alexander Cherniaev (Hackney) triumphed with 5½/6 in the Open to edge out Bogdan Lalic (Wood Green), while Jamie Sparrow (Muswell Hill) won the Minor ahead of David Everitt (Haywards Heath).

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Major: 1 Oliver Finnegan (Loughton) 5½, 2–3 Jacob Yoon (Enfield), John Bussmann (Burston) 4½.

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