

Fagernes Chess International 13-20 April 2014

THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT **1**



Unfortunately, Norwegian GM Simen Agdestein (2625) and Dutch GM Sipke Ernst (2564) both had to withdraw due to illness within the last 24 hours before round one. Fortunately, this field including 11 GMs among only 42 players, with a median ELO around 2400, still is a high quality Swiss offering excellent title norm chances. First round made a firework start, with many surprising results and even more entertaining games.

The last game to finish tonight was the first board – and became the main sensation, as seeded 01 GM Jon Ludvig Hammer (2647) lost against seeded 22 IM Nicolai Getz (2388).

“Possibly the worst game I have ever played. What were you thinking about while playing that opening?” was Hammer’s spontaneous comment after the game. Although the statement was to overdo in self-criticism, the question definitely was relevant. Getz playing white obviously had some preparation in this Caro Kann line, in which white keeps an extra pawn at d5 while black soon gets out the pieces. Advancing the bonus pawn to d6 however soon backfired, as black a few moves later had a dominating pair of bishops and a direct hunt against white’s exposed queen at a3-a4. Hammer probably was clearly better before winning back the d6-pawn at move 20 and more or less winning afterwards.



Jon Ludvig Hammer – Nicolai Getz

While Hammer from move 21 on lost the thread Getz however gradually repaired his position, and after 33 moves the game seemed ready for a very drawish endgame. Frustrated and/or overambitious Hammer then blundered at move 34, and within a few moves lost both his bishops for a rook. The endgame with rook and e-pawn versus knight, bishop and g-pawn probably still was a draw. Playing black at that stage still was unpleasant, and after he missed a chance to force the draw with a tactical 46.--- e4!, white got the necessary help to activate his pieces and advance the g-pawn.

After 79 moves the classical technical endgame test with knight, bishop and king versus king was on the board. This is a well known win, but having played for five and a half hour Getz made some inaccuracies, and ran short of time on the clock. 129 was the magical move number after which Hammer could demand a draw due to the 50 moves rule, hence the game finish after 110 moves was an exciting final countdown on Getz' clock as well as on Hammer's scoresheet. Finding the winning maneuvers just in time Getz still completed the mate at move 120 – with 19 seconds left on the clock...

The second board meeting also lasted nearly six hours and also was a very interesting and tense battle, but still got the expected result in the end. Playing white against his 15 year old Norwegian teammate IM Aryan Tari (2387), second seeded GM Evgeny Romanov (2642) started up with some kind of slow Torre set up, but then suddenly accelerated it by 6.e4.

Black probably was fine for the first eleven moves, but white still got better after black placed his queen in an exposed position at f4 the next move. Giving up his white squared bishop to snatch a pawn at h5 afterwards probably was not white's best plan, as black got sufficient compensation from his pair of bishops and the d-file. After toying around with a repetition white however played on with the correct move and came better after 23.Ne3!. Following this he kept the extra pawn after exchanging queens. Tari fought on bravely, and succeeded in reaching a rook and bishop endgame in which his active pieces combined with the different colored bishops gave some drawing hopes. Still white always was at least one pawn ahead, and due to his active king and passed h-pawn the final endgame proved won.

Four more interesting games, but still four less demanding wins for the remaining GMs above 2600. Third seeded Polish GM Gregorz Gajewski (2631) as black against the very talented Norwegian junior Johan Salomon (2343) got the more active bishops, and instructively mobilized his pieces for a kingside attack. The game still appeared interesting as white after 30 moves was allowed to exchange his queen for two rooks, but having an extra pawn and a lasting attack black was in control.



Gregorz Gajewski

GM Evgeny Postny (2630) of Israel sacrificed a pawn at d5 in a sharp Queen's Indian line against FM Lars Oskar Hauge (2330), and a double edged position came on board after white castled long and black short. Postny probably was in reasonable control during the following complications, and not too surprising his two extra bishops (!) in the rook and bishops endgame proved more important than black's three extra pawns.

The winner of last year's Fagernes tournament, Lithuanian GM Eduardas Rozentalis (2624), continues his excellent play in Norway, tonight winning within two and a half hour as black against FM Kristian Stuvik Holm (2321). Playing black in a Classical Nimzo Indian opening, Rozentalis instructively opened the c-file against white's queen on c2, and mobilized his pieces to win decisive material just after 20 moves. Aged 50 Rozentalis is the oldest member of the 2600-club in this tournament, but obviously he should not be underestimated as candidate for another first prize.

The youngest member of this 2600-club, GM Sam Shankland (2616) from USA, took his turn and won very convincingly as white against FM Brede Kvisvik (2300). Allowed to win back the pawn and to establish a strong center with e4-e5 white was clearly better from the opening, and increased the pressure to reach an easily won endgame with an extra exchange for white.

The foreign GMs between 2500 and 2600 also made a good start. Playing black in a Sicilian Kan line against Peter Flermoen (2232), Russian GM Maxim Turov (2593) after an early queen exchange had the better pawn structure and a pleasant queenside initiative. Although having to play for some hours more, he won without too much excitement about the result.

Playing his first tournament as a GM, the 18 year old Dutchman Benjamin Bok (2590) got some more resistance from unpredictable Alf Roger Andersen (2230) in a closed and complex Pirc duel. White still was better almost all of the time, and stayed cool when black tried to complicate by sacrifice first an exchange and then a piece more just before 40 moves.

Lithuanian GM Aloyzas Kveinys (2543) looked somewhat more shaky as black in a complex Sicilian game against Norwegian WGM Olga Dolzhikova (2209). 16.c4?! followed by 17.Qxb7?! was an overambitious plan from white, after which black exchanged queens and won back the pawn with a pleasant pressure. As Kveinys failed to find the most critical plans, Dolzhikova despite time trouble proved able to consolidate her position and exchange down to a drawish endgame with rook, knight and five pawns on each side. Not for the first time Kveinys however kept up play better than his opponent in the fifth hour, and helped by Dolzhikova's clock he landed in a won rook endgame early in the sixth hour.



Olga Dolzhikova - Aloyzas Kveinys

The young foreign GM-candidates also made a promising start. 17 year old IM Avital Boruchovsky (2492) of Israel is only lacking eight ELO points to get his GM title, and got 1.6 of them as he won in inspired style as white against Odd Martin Guttulsrud (2206). Demonstrating the better understanding of the opening, white after exchanging the dark squared bishops and placing a knight on d5 had a promising pressure in this King's Indian duel, and exchanged down to a totally won endgame when his opponent tried to complicate by sacrifice.



Odd Martin Guttulsrud vs Avital Boruchovsky

16 year old German IM Alexander Donchenko (2471) meanwhile did not have many more worries as black against the unpredictable FM Richard Bjerke (2194). This Sicilian line with 3.Bb5+ hardly was Bjerke's best opening idea of the year, as black's strong piece squares at d5 and c5 soon proved much more important than the white pawn at e5. After being helpful to exchange queens white just lost the key pawn at e5, and following some more German efficiency from Donchenko white's position collapsed within a few more moves.

Danish-German IM Rasmus Svane (2487) got a much longer game as black, facing the dry and solid King's Indian Advance set up of WIM Ellen Hagesæther (2204). Although black's queenside play was more important than white's center space in this position, white was in the game until fatally placing her queen out of play at a6 just before 40 moves. 16 year old Svane did not hesitate to catch in the material, and moving all the more close to 2500 he also looks all the more like a GM in his play.



Ellen Hagesæther - Rasmus Svane

While the guests overall did very well, the Norwegian GMs and GM-candidates overall had a demanding start. GM Leif Erlend Johannessen (2530) first went for a knock out win as he sacrificed an extra pawn in an airy line of an Accepted Queen's Gambit against Johan-Sebastian Christiansen (2207). Fearing for his king black returned one pawn and disrupted his pawn structure to force a queen exchange. After finally winning back the second pawn at c6 white had a slight initiative and refused a draw in the double rook endgame. Christiansen still defended well and got his draw as white failed to come up with anything more than sound moves. While Johannessen after an inspired start might have been a little too careful.

GM Rune Djurhuus (2447) following an inspired start played much too hard. In a complex and very Nimzo-like Bogo Indian duel, his piece sacrifice against 13 year old Johannes Haug (2096) might have been correct. But if so Djurhuus pushed his luck too far when he kept on playing a piece down, instead of taking out a perpetual check. Very talented Haug anyway used his chance efficiently, and will be an exciting player to follow for the next rounds. Same with 14 year old Sebastian Mihajlov (2197), today drawing from a won position as black against IM Frode Elsness (2483). This game made a tense start with a complex Slav line in which white is a pawn up and better from a computer program perspective, but in the practical world black often gets much compensation due to his active pair of bishops and chances for a kingside attack. He definitely did this game, as white after refusing a draw immediately overlooked a tactical stroke on h4. Elsness fought on well with a pawn down and a dangerous attack. The pawn endgame with an extra pawn for black still was a win, but Elsness fought on bravely and scraped a draw as Mihajlov missed his chance(s) to active his queenside majority by a b6 break.

IM Torbjørn Ringdal Hansen (2469) meanwhile also failed to win, despite being better almost all of the game as white against Frode Lillevoold (2182). White had an initiative from his prepared Ruy

Lopez line, and with black's king stuck in the center zone white had an apparently promising attack. Lillevold however defended stubbornly and Ringdal Hansen's creative sacrifice succeeded only to get an extra pawn in a queen and rook endgame – in which he efficiently and elegantly forced himself to accept a repetition of moves. Elsness and Ringdal Hansen still did better than IM Frode Urkedal (2494), again losing the 2500 demand out of sight after being outplayed as black against the talented 15 year old English player Ravi Haria (2207). White probably had an edge from this closed Ruy Lopez, and anyway did not hesitate when getting the chance first to establish a passed pawn at c5 and then to open the position for his powerful pair of bishops. While Haria playing an excellent game got a brilliant start on his IM-norm search, Urkedal a few weeks after completing his second GM-norm derailed at the first station on his search for the third one.

Keeping aside Getz and his sensational first board win, the only good news for the Norwegian GM norm hopes this round was IM Espen Lie (2460) winning a sound game as black against Arne Hagesæther (2143). Black instructively sacrificed his d5-pawn to get a pair of bishops and a strong initiative, and kept a promising pressure after regaining the pawn. Blundering two pawns still was a helpful gift from Hagesæther – on his own birthday.

Further excitement came on the final rank of boards, starring two young Norwegian talents. 14 year old Sondre Merkesvik (2042) having a pair of bishops and some space in the middle game looked slightly better for a long time against IM Timfey Galinsky (2427). The patient Ukraine representative still turned the game in the fourth hour and developed a decisive attack in the fifth.

14 year old Eivind Djurhuus (1977) on the other hand was under some positional pressure from the opening as black against English IM Jovanka Houska (2410), but used his chance to turn the tide as Houska ran seriously short of time. With Houska having ten moves left for two minutes, black suddenly was a pawn up with the better position in a tense queen and rook position. Djurhuus Junior probably did right to go for more than a perpetual check in this situation, but if so he did it in the wrong way. True enough black just before 40 moves won a second pawn by a tactical rook exchange. But he still was the one to fight for a draw in the queen endgame afterwards - as white's advanced d-pawn proved much more important than the number of pawns. Losing this game after five hours play must have been a hard set back for Djurhuus, but his play still promised much in his first GM group start.

Line Jin Jørgensen (1926) in her first test at this level played fair enough, but still lost some pawns and the game against sound playing Australian IM John Paul Wallace (2402).

The Open Norwegian Championship following some accepted post entries today includes 63 players with an ELO gap well above 1000 points and an age gap around 60 years.

Top seeded Alexander Flaata (2111) used the opportunity to start the tournament two days delayed with two walk over draws, and consequently he has not yet arrived. On the first board, 19 year old and second seeded Jens Hjort Kjølberg (2092) got an interesting challenger in 14 year old Andreas Fossan (1699). Their Bogo Indian game probably was in dynamic balanced until Fossan as white blundered with 19.f4??, overlooking 19... Qa7+ and 20... Rbd8 trapping the white queen at d6. Although Fossan made the best out of the queen loss, Kjølberg had no problems completing the win.

Third seeded Christian Laverton (2080) also looked very convincing when defeating veteran Gunnar Bue (1693) in 25 moves, instructively combining a seventh rank attack with an f-file attack.

Third board however was a surprise which could well have been a sensation – as Håkon Bentsen (2074) after overambitious attacking play with black ran into a dangerous attack himself against Linda Marie Hansen (1685). Bentsen escaped from the playing venue with half of the point as Hansen after some inaccuracies accepted a repetition of checks, although she could still play on with a clear advantage.

16 year old Kazim Yilmaz (1683) also offered a good fight as black against Vidar Taksrud (2052), but still lost the knight versus bishop endgame to his much more experienced opponent. Today's sensation man on the top boards instead became 42 year old Erling Skjelstad (1667), winning within three hours against 15 year old Kjell Håkon Lien (2050) – true enough somewhat luckily as Lien suddenly blundered a rook in a better position.

Tonight's time trouble drama in the Open Norwegian Championship came on board eight, as 16 year old Monika Machlik (1976) running short of time failed to complete her promising kingside attack against 17 year old Sverre Skjølås Dyrhaug (1574). Having achieved counterplay by realizing e6-e5 Dyrhaug came a pawn up with an advantage - only to lose it all again as he having only a few seconds left on the clock blundered a mate instead of finding a tricky defence at move 39...

The talented Machlik siblings from Tromsø following this started up with 3/3, and most of the players on first half won as expected in the first round. A notable surprise came from another young Tromsø player, as 11 year old Tor Fredrik Kaasen well ahead on the clock kept his concentration well against Alena Ayzenberg (1929) – first exchanging a positional advantage into a pawn win, and then completed the attack in the queen and rook endgame. Another surprise was 15 year old Kimya Sajjadi (1503), defending well in the endgame to draw a fortress position with rook versus bishop and two pawns against Daniel Snerthammer (1913).



Edit Machlik – Amalie I. Merkesvik

In short this overall was an exciting start, including a lot of fighting chess and some surprising results also in the ELO-group.