

Fagernes Chess International 13-20 April 2014

THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT

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The first round after a double round in some tournaments becomes relatively quiet. This “middle round” was one of them, as four out of the first five boards were drawn.

The tournament situation following this still is very exciting, with GM Evgeny Postny leading alone at 4.5/5 just ahead of three other 2600-GMs at 4.0/5 – with five more challengers lurking at 3.5/5.

The first board meeting between GM Evgeny Postny (2630) and Sam Shankland (2616) was drawn after 20 moves and 60 minutes. Still it was a game of theoretical interest and not without exciting moments.

While Postny early started to think and spent 50 minutes for his first 19 moves in a Grünfeld Exchange line, Shankland used only two minutes – and then offered a draw. Postny was thinking for ten minutes more, but then stopped the clock.

Although white had a passed pawn at d6 the position probably was about in balance, but still offered chances for both players.

From a starting point at 4.0/4 and 3.5/4 respectively, Postny was satisfied to get out of this preparation with a draw even as white – while Shankland still was satisfied to draw Postny as black.



Shankland vs Postny at board 1.

Second board between second seeded GM Evgeny Romanov (2642) and fifth seeded GM Eduardas Rozentalis (2624) was an unusual English line with 2... b6 – which lasted some moves less and some minutes more than the first board.

Playing white in an English opening, Romanov seemed ready to play for a win when he after playing h4-h5 castled long in move 13 – but still accepted a draw two moves later on.

The position probably was about in balance, as white had the pair of bishops and black the better pawn structure. Solid and sound Rozentalis after drawing both the two top seeded players with black is still following the first board from a confident back seat place. Romanov despite this dull white draw will get his chance as white against Postny on the first board tomorrow.



Urkedal black against Gajewski.

The third board meeting between GM Grzegorz Gajewski (2631) and IM Frode Urkedal (2494) started as a Queen's Indian Fianchetto, in which the plan with 14...g6 15.f4 Bg7 looked shaky for black.

As Gajewski instead of winning the black d6-pawn with 16.Nb5 went for a double-edged kingside attack with 16.g4?!, black was able to keep his d6-pawn and get some counterplay in the e-file.

A tense four hours struggle followed.

White after accepting an exchange of queens played on a pawn down with two rooks and one knight on each side, as he had the more active pieces and chances for a kingside attack.

Under double pressure on the clock and board black finally blundered with 37...Nb6?, losing both the f7 pawn and the d6 pawn after 38.Nh6+ Kh7 39.Nxf7. A honest loss as black against a 2600-player, but still a loss for Urkedal – while four wins and one loss gives a hard hitting Gajewski shared second place so far.

Forth board game between two young lions, IM Avital Boruchovski (2492) and GM Benjamin Bok (2590) true enough was a draw. Still it was no way a short and/or boring draw.

The start was a Ruy Lopez Berlin defence, resulting in a symmetrical center and an about balanced position.

Playing for a kingside attack with his queen and pair of bishops, black had a slight pressure in the middle game. The game still remained balanced until white made a mistake with 35.Qe3?, allowing black to exchange queens and play an endgame with the pair of bishops and the better pawn structure.

Around move 40 Boruchovski was under heavy pressure, but creatively sacrificed a pawn to exchange one of the bishops and reach a fortress-like knight versus bishop endgame. This is the kind of endgame position computer programs often declares winning, but without having any winning plan to suggest. Whether the fortress was secure remains a bit unclear, but anyway it worked out as Bok's plan turned out to force another fortress which definitely was watertight.

Bok is playing well but scoring about as expected so far, while Boruchovsky after this draw has won 4.80 out of the 7.50 ELO points needed to become a GM.

The Norwegian home crowd had some expectations for the game between IM Frode Elsness (2483) and GM Jon Ludvig Hammer (2647), as earlier episodes with these two players includes one play off match for the Norwegian Championship and several other interesting games.

This one was a Grünfeld Exchange line duel in which the queens were exchanged, after which black at move 16 offered a draw in a rooks and minor pieces endgame balancing between equal and slightly better for white.

Hammer did not expect Elsness to accept, but Elsness still did – hence it seems the players after all have some kind of mutual respect. Elsness probably should have played on with white if he believed a GM-norm in this tournament still possible, but following this draw has reached an acceptable result from a terrible start.

Hammer has repaired his play, but his optimism for the tournament still seems a bit shaken by the first round earth quake.

IM Torbjørn Ringdal Hansen (2469) as white against GM Maxim Turov (2593) and his solid Caro-Kann opening made an optimist try with 4.h4 – and then sacrificed a pawn at e5.

Although black had to play with a king on f8 the sacrifice unfortunately for white was too loose, and if you have to make a too loose pawn sacrifice against a GM then Maxim Turov is probably not the right man...

Hansen tried to be consequent by sacrificing a loose exchange as well,

but back in the driving seat of his chess tractor Turov had no problems driving home the full point.

Turov following this is also at 3.5/5 and among the prize candidates, while Hansen despite having a very good holiday with his girlfriend so far is not having a very good tournament with his opponents.



Ringdal Hansen sacrificing against Turov.



Donchenko - Kveinys was a safe draw.

IM Alexander Donchenko (2471) and Aloyzas Kveinys (2543) despite all other differences both are safe and sound chess players, hence a draw in their internal meeting came as no surprise. From a rather symmetrical English opening the players reached some kind of hedgehog position, in which both had to risk much to reach winning chances. As none of them were willing to risk anything, they from move 18 left the pawn structure static and moved around with their pieces - until moving around the same pieces on

the same squares three times... Donchenko so far is heading for a good result, but hardly for a GM-norm. While Kveinys so far is a strong candidate for a money prize, but hardly for top three.

Playing white GM Leif Erlend Johannessen (2530) was an odds one favorite against sensation man Frode Lillevold (2182).

White came better from a Semi-Slav opening after placing a pawn at c5 and controlling the important e5-square. Still black was well inside the game until he at move 14 weakened his position with g5. Later is was a one way driven freeway, as Johannessen suddenly in an inspired mood opened the board against black's all the more sweaty king at e7 – the decisive blow being a bishop sacrifice at f5. 1-0 after 27 moves – as white's attack would have compensated for two pieces, while he actually was two pawns up.

Lillevold is back on earth at 2.5/5, but still ahead of schedule for an IM-norm – while Johannessen at 3.5/5 is still in acceleration after his slow start.



Svane failing to beat Tari.

The game between IM Rasmus Svane (2487) and IM Aryan Tari (2387) was an English Fianchetto line with many early exchanges. Too many from a black point of view – as white was left with no sorrows and a pleasant queenside pressure in the remaining position with two rooks, one bishop and six pawns on each side.

As Svane increased the pressure Tari had to give up a pawn, and found himself in a depressing bishop endgame with four versus

five pawns. It looked winning for white, and definitely became so as Svane intervened with his king among black's remaining kingside pawn.

The idea of sacrificing the bishop to promote the h-pawn definitely definitely was correct.

But because Svane definitely did it in the wrong way and overlooked that black with a tricky Bh8!-plan could lock in white's king at h8, the result suddenly became a queen endgame in which white a pawn down had to watch out some moves to assure the draw.

Both the very talented IMs should have won this game to be in the GM-norm race.

As none of them did, 2.5/5 now is slightly below expected for Svane and somewhat above expected for Tari.

16 year old Johan Salomon (2343) today played white against IM Espen Lie (2460), and pinned his hope for an IM-norm upon a closed Ruy Lopez in which white first had a small space advantage.

Play remained balanced for twenty moves, and white fair enough offered a draw while forcing a queen exchange after 23 moves. Still being the IM black decided to play on - and demonstrated the better understanding of this rooks and minor pieces position.



Lie beating Salomon with black.

Combining play against white's queenside and kingside pawns, black went on to reach a won minor pieces endgame after four hours. Lie although out of the run for a GM-norm is still in the run for a good result, while Salamon still follows the yo-yo of the Swiss – losing to higher rated opponents and defeating lower rated opponents every other round...

To make a not so long story even shorter: GM Rune Djurhuus (2447) had one of his very happy days with white – while WGM Olga Dolzhikova (2209) had one of her not so happy days with black. White's set up with e3-f3-Ng3 gave chances for a kingside attack.

Although f4-f5 was not objectively the best plan afterwards, it still worked out very well after black misplaced her queen at e7 in move 16. A few moves later white had a winning attack, and black's position was anyway a study in collapse when she to avoid losing on time started to blunder pieces around move 33.



Mihajlov (black) was crushed by Galinsky.

The game between IM Timofey Galinsky (2427) and Sebastian Mihajlov (2197) started as a slow Italian opening, in which black's double e-pawn gave white a slight edge.

As the position opened up and the bishops were exchanged, white came somewhat better as his knights on e3 and e5 were superior to the black knights and a5 and h5. Still black was well in a tense game until he at move 24 overlooked an elegant (but still far from invisible) knight sacrifice at h6.

Galinsky immediately saw his chance, after which his knights and queen crashed through on the kingside within four moves.

Mihajlov was shocked about his own play after the game, but still has a plus result and chances for an IM-norm. Galinsky still is following the Swiss waves and doing slightly below expected.

IM Nicolai Getz (2388) has had some problems with his openings this tournament, and that history repeated itself as he came worse in a Scotch opening as black against Johannes Haug (2096).

After both players castled long white held a pleasant pressure, playing with both the better pawn structure and the more active pieces.



Haug beating Getz.

Haug in an inspired mood went on to establish a passed pawn at e6 before move 20, and although running short of time he had no problems realizing the win on the board.

Getz despite his sensational win against Hammer in the first round is below expected score after this loss. 13 year old Haug, which was accepted as a participant without being qualified on ELO, is truly demonstrating his talent and at 3.0/5 is inside the IM-norm calculations – with a plus.



Houska beating Kvivik with the Caro-Kann.

Black definitely had made the better Caro-Kann preparation for the game between FM Brede Kvivik (2300) and IM Jovanka Houska (2410). Unwilling to admit he was worse with white after 13 moves, Kvivik very strangely invited black to play $Nxf2+$ followed by $Nxh1$. Houska saw no reason to turn down the invitation – as black remained an exchange and a pawn up after losing the stranded knight. White's bishop at d6 combined with a circling knight gave him some counterplay, but Houska in a professional mood had few problems winning the rook endgame after sacrificing back the exchange at d6.

The Norwegian teenage meeting between FM Kristian Stuvik Holm (2321) and Johan-Sebastian Christiansen (2207) was a not very interesting 13-move draw, but outside the board somehow still a nice performance from both players.

Stuvik Holm was too ill to play, but still played as he did not want to destroy Christiansen's IM norm chances by a walk over. Christiansen appreciated this and accepted an early draw offer.

It remains to see whether Christiansen can reach an IM-norm this tournament. Holm for health reasons definitely cannot, but hopefully he will soon be back for another tournament.

To avoid walk over for other players in the next rounds, substitute Jo Kristian Løberg (2039) will join the tournament from round six.

Young Ravi Haria (2207) today played white against IM John Paul Wallace (2402), and decided to test a Sicilian with 3.Bb5+. Playing with two e-pawns in this variation was fine for black, as his d-file control was more important, and following some tactical exchanges white's king at h2 turned out to be more exposed than black's king at f8.



Haria – Wallace.

Having to watch out for counterplay black took his time, but completed the attack with a mate at move 47. Wallace after wasting his chances in earlier games looked happy to win this one, while Haria despite playing interesting games has had pole out after his sensational first round win.

Playing black against FM Lars Oskar Hauge (2330), Odd Martin Guttulsrud (2206) today spent 75 minutes on the first 13 moves in a complex Sicilian Scheveningen. Due to his active bishops black might have been fine on the board, but white still had some advantage as he was able to uphold a dominating pawn at d5. The endgame after 30 moves looked very promising for white as he was a pawn up with a dominating pair of bishops, and after the first time control white was totally winning playing with rook, bishop and two kingside pawns versus rook and three kingside pawns. Guttulsrud defended creatively and got some chances by advancing his passed h-pawn, but Hauge after all could sacrifice his rook to win safely with bishop and two connected pawns against rook.



Lars Oskar Hauge

Peter Flermoen (2232) despite the earlier set back continues to play hard attacking chess, and was finally rewarded as he today won a King's Indian like Pirc battle against Alf Roger Andersen (2230). Playing a Sämisch set up with f3-Be3-Bh6-h4-h5 white kept a kingside pressure, and after 25 moves felt forced to accept a queen exchange at the price of two pawns. Playing two pawns up with the more active pieces, white later controlled the endgame and won after four hours. This game qualifies as a big improvement regarding play and score for Flermoen, while creative Andersen still is playing too loose this tournament.

The game between WIM Ellen Hagesæther (2204) and Line Jin Jørgensen (1926) was a prestige duel and a practically important game - for two women players from the Karmøy island, now respectively candidates for Norway I and Norway II in the Chess Olympics 2014.

It started as a King's Indian Advance a la French, which remained very close even after the first set of pawns left the board at move 18. Allowed to play f4 and f5, white without much of a risk got a space advantage and some chances for a kingside attack.

Finally getting a suitable attacking position Ellen demonstrated she can also be a strong attacking player, first opening the g-file for her heavy pieces and then switching off the light for black by sacrificing a rook at h6 in move 31.

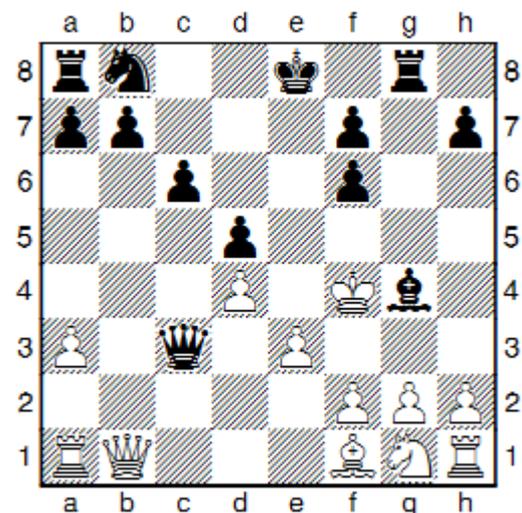
An honest loss for Line Jin, but still a win was a major improvement for Ellen after a demanding start on this tournament.

The game between FM Richard Bjerke (2194) and Eivind X Djurhuus (1977) was a Sicilian Najdorf resulting in a fairly balanced isolani position, as white had a pawn at e4 and black a nice square at e5. Some exchanges later white got some pressure against the backward pawn at d6, but as white never found anything more and still had to take care of his e4-pawn, the game was peacefully drawn by a repetition just before 30 moves.

Finally short to mention - the game between Bergen team mates Sondre Merkesvik (2042) and Arne Hagesæther (2143) was drawn after seven moves. As black had voluntarily given up his bishop for a knight at f3 white probably had the better long term perspectives, but we will never know what he could have made out of them.

As both players have been playing below their best and had pole out in the first four rounds, both very understandable now preferred a safe draw and some time to rest.

The Open Norwegian Championship made a shocking start this round - as the white king on first board was observed at f4 in move 13. Meeting an unexpected Bb4-line is a Queens Gambit Exchange line, 14 year old Endre Machlik (1790) became so eager to destroy black's kingside structure with Bxf6 that he sacrificed his pawn on c3 with check. Having to answer 9... Qxc3+ with a painful 10.Ke2 white tried to evacuate the king to f3, but then had to answer Bg4+ with 13.Kf4... It was of course too creative to work out - and it didn't. Probably in shock 17-year old opponent Sigve Hølleland (1871) missed some attacking possibilities, but after exchanging queens he still had two extra pawns and went on to win the endgame. Two Machliks were short of time simultaneously at board one and two today, but the second one then was the drama as Hølleland at that stage was about three pawns up in endgame on board one.



Endre Machlik – Hølleland after 13.Kf4.

The second board game between 16 year old Monika Machlik (1976) and 19 year old Jens Hjort Kjølberg (2092) meanwhile was a Four Pawns King's Indian, in which black after playing d5 followed by d4 had a pair of bishops and a space advantage most of the middle game.

As he failed to make anything concrete out of the space or the bishops, the tide however gradually turned between move 20 and 30. Monika then exchanged down to an endgame with queen and knight versus queen and bishop, in which her octopus knight at d6 combined with a passed pawn at c5 gave her a decisive advantage.

With both players having less than five minutes left for ten moves white sacrificed the knight on d6 to advance the pawn from c5 via b6 to a7. The sacrifice, although extraordinary creative, actually was a blunder. Still it worked out well as a shaken Kjølberg first missed his chance to win, and then at move 41 blundered away the draw too.

Getting two pawns on the board and one hour more on the clock Monika took her time but realized the win in the queen endgame. A great sportsman, Kjølberg despite wasting a chance to win after the game concluded the outcome was well deserved: "I had to play black against the wrong opponent today. And she played better than me." Monika following this jumpy game and this important win in unshared second at 4.5/5, and will play black against Hølleland on first board tomorrow.

In the large shadow of the top boards the other top rated players marched forward this round too. Third seeded Christian Laverton (2080) did not take the fastest train after opponent Snorre Rygg (1821) blundered his vital d5-pawn in the opening on board three, but white still reached the final station and realized his extra pawn in the rook endgame some four hours later on.

Eight-rated Willy Kristiansen (2017) also might be a man to watch out for, today sacrificing a piece to win as black against Edit Machlik (1913) on board five.

Another exciting player at 4.0/5 is 13 year old Trygve Dahl (1867), today winning a pawn just after the opening and converting it in the endgame against Alena Ayzenberg (1929).

The still unpredictable veteran Helge Theting (1943) also came back on the track at +3 after succeeding to realize his extra pawn in a marathon rook and bishop endgame against Eivind Risting (1743) today.

From an ELO point of view the win of Henrik Løbersli (1857) as black against veteran Vidar Taksrud (2052) was a small sensation. I still hesitate to accept that, as first Løbersli is obviously underrated and second both players are completely unpredictable. Black by the way was better almost all of the time and won very well deserved, although both players missed a classical Bxh7+ which could have given white a clear advantage after 14 moves... Løbersli following this also joined the 4.0/5 group.

While first seeded Alexander Flaata (2111) and fourth seeded Håkon Bentsen (2074) both won with black without too many difficulties, and both now can see the top boards without using a telescope.

Seventh seeded Frenchman David Maloberti (2048) is in the same category, after he returned from a more or less lost position to win a wild attacking battle against the colorful tent tourist Linda Hansen (1685). Yes, this overall was a very entertaining round in the Open.