

Fagernes Chess International 13-20 April 2014

THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT

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Still no complaints about the fighting spirit of this GM-group after seven days at Fagernes - as round eight became another hard-fought round in which all the three first boards got a winner.

As GM Sam Shankland won an intense four-hour battle against GM Benjamin Bok on the first board, while GM Sam Evgeny Postny won a complex five-hour battle against IM Avital Boruchovsky on the second board, Shankland and Postny are now sharing the lead at 6.5/8.

Shankland due to his higher average of opponents will win the tournament in case of equal points after round nine, but will get another hard test as white against top rated GM Jon Ludvig Hammer. The most interesting game to follow still will be Postny playing black against IM Frode Elsness – as Elsness after winning a six-hour battle with GM Gregorz Gajewski today, can complete his GM-title if winning tomorrow!

Haven taken over the first board from Postny, GM Sam Shankland (2616) started up with a modest Caro Kann opening as black against GM Benjamin Bok (2590).

Bok established a space advantage by playing 3.e5, but chances looked about balanced after the e5-pawn was exchanged at f6 in move 11.

Already having castled long, black opened up the kingside and went for a center break with e5 followed by exd4 and dxc3. In a dynamically balanced position 16.Bf4?! might have been a mistake, as black was allowed to establish a passed pawn at c2. Although the black c2-pawn remained a thorn in the side, white having exchanged the queens and placed his knight on the strong d4-square probably had the better position around move 25-28.



Shankland beating Bok in round 8.

As Bok was about to run seriously short of time, Shankland with nearly one hour left on the clock got in another flashy tactical move with 30.--- Ne5! – sacrificing his knight to open the kingside files for his rooks.

White reportedly could have saved himself and balanced the position with 34.Nb3!, but with less than 20 seconds left to reach move 40 he understandably missed that chance. Although having only six seconds left for his last four moves (!), Bok reached 40 moves in time. That however did not help him much as Shankland then was an exchange up and controlled Bok's passed e-pawn from behind. 0-1 after 46 moves means Bok despite a performance close to 2700 is more or less out of the fight for first prize in this tournament with his 5.5/8.

Still undefeated and inspired, Shankland with a performance close to 2800 reached 6.5/8 and put a lot of pressure on Postny.



Postny - Boruchovsky

Meanwhile GM Evgeny Postny (2630), still enjoying Fagernes in general and the seafood in particular, played a chronically complicated game on the second board.

Handling the white pieces in a Catalan against his GM-elect countryman Avital Boruchovsky (2492), Postny today had no obvious advantage from the opening. A materially balanced and positionally complex struggle however intensified further as

white played 24.Bh3!? followed by 25.Be6! – sacrificing his bishop to establish an octopus knight at e6 and start a direct attack against the black king.

After defending well for the next moves, Boruchovsky made a fatal blunder with 28.--- Qb8? - allowing white to win two pieces for a rook with 29.Rxa8! Qxa8 30.Qxf6.

Although white was still an exchange down, his attack afterwards should have been decisive. Postny however blundered back when he somehow mixed up some variations and played 32.d6? instead of the instant win with 33.Ng5! Re7 34.d6.

The position still was much easier to play for white and before 40 moves he forced an elegantly won endgame: In the bitter end black although playing with rook and bishop versus two knights had no chance to stop white's connected passed pawns.

1-0 after 51 moves means Boruchovsky still has an ELO above 2500, but at best can hope for one of the smaller money prizes. While Postny has a performance close to 2800 and with an outstanding score of 6.5/8 is doing one of his best tournaments - but still is only sharing first place following Shankland's great result.



Elsness can make his third GM-norm after beating Gajewski with black.

“But of course I will do that!”, was the fast reply from IM Frode Elsness (2483) when he before this game was informed that he had to defeat two 2600-players in the final rounds to make a GM-norm out of this. On the other side of the board, Polish GM Grzegorz Gajewski (2631) needed a win as white to keep alive his chances for a top three prize. Following a slow Bogo Indian start the players

cooperated to accelerate the game as white took a space advantage with e4-e5, while black first hit back in the center with c5-cxd4 and then snatched a pawn at h4.

A tense struggle followed as white won back the pawn from d4 and got compensation for the one from h4. The middle game battle reached a climax as white sacrificed a bishop at g6 to open up around the black king. White had a repetition of checks afterwards, and Elsness reluctantly accepted he could not leave the repetition without risking much too much.

Instead Gajewski, frustrated not to find anything more than a draw, at move 30 left the repetition of checks to start a rather strange Qb5-Qb3-Qb4 maneuver.

Getting the one move needed to bring his extra bishop on c8 into play, Elsness soon took over and after 40 moves had reached a won endgame with queen, bishop and two pawns against queen and three pawns. Although the games lasted nearly 40 moves more and nearly six hours in total, black later appeared to be in reasonable control.

Gajewski in this way knocked himself out of the fight for top three, while Elsness can make the third norm and complete his GM title if winning with white tomorrow. So far so good for Elsness – the “only” problem is that he will have to be the first in this tournament to defeat rock solid Postny...



Hammer - Johannessen

Although it is sad to admit for a Norwegian, the fourth board game between GM Jon Ludvig Hammer (2647) and GM Leif Erlend Johannessen (2530) was a much less exciting and interesting game.

Facing some kind of O’Kelly set up in a Sicilian, white found nothing better than tactical exchanges leading to a position with two rooks, two bishops and six pawns on each side.

White’s lead in development did not make much of a difference in this position, as black

could lean on a symmetric pawn structure and complete his development without difficulties.

Draw agreed on white's suggestion after 25 moves in a completely equalized position. Meaning this tournament will be a disappointment for Hammer whatever his result in the last round, while Johannessen despite a slow start now is close to expected score – and still one out of only three undefeated players in this field.

The 16 year old German IM Alexander Donchenko (2471) needed a win as white on the fifth board to keep his GM norm hope alive, but soon came under pressure against second seeded GM Evgeny Romanov (2642).

This Modern opening soon became very Benkö-like as black sacrificed a pawn at b5, and after a tactical queen exchange he won back the pawn with an ongoing initiative.

Donchenko played well when stabilizing his position after this turbulent start, and succeeded to equalize in the middle game, but became too ambitious when playing e4, f4 and g4 in move 24-26. Romanov immediately hit hard back with an exchange sacrifice at e4.

Due to his more active pieces and passed c-pawn, the Russian GM later was more or less winning in the endgame with rook, knight and six pawns versus two rooks and four pawns. Donchenko however fought on well, and following some mistakes from Romanov the young German crawled into a drawn rook endgame in the fifth hour.

This draw was the final goodbye to Donchenko's GM norm hope in this tournament, but even in case of a loss tomorrow he will make another plus result and continue his march against 2500.



Rozentalis - Urkedal

The game between GM Eduardas Rozentalis (2624) and IM Frode Urkedal (2494) made a slow start with 3.g3 in a Vienna game.

Hence both players early found themselves in unknown land. Black looked fine for the first ten moves, but soon got problems hanging on as white with 13.Qh5 accelerated for a direct kingside attack.

14.--- h6?! was a weakening move intended to stop Ng5, but

without much of a success as white after preparing with 16.f4 played 17.Ng5! with an attack coming up.

For the second round in a row Urkedal suddenly collapsed in a worse position: Black was anyway in deep trouble when taking the knight at g5 in move 19, and after taking it he went mate before 25 moves.

After this very nice attacking game Rozentalis might still win a couple of ELO points and a small prize. Urkedal will definitely lose ELO and has had a disappointing tournament after his GM-norm in the Norwegian League.

Urkedal still was not the first Norwegian titleholder collapsing today, as the “man overboard” reported in the second hour turned out to be GM Rune Djurhuus (2447).

His greedy pawn snatch with 12.-- - Qxe4+ in this Benkö-gambit might have been acceptable, but if so then 13.--- Be7? was a dangerous mistake and 14.--- 0-0?? an outright blunder. Coolly playing 13.0-0 followed by 14.Re1, GM Maxim Turov (2593)



Turov - Djurhuus

by simple means won a piece - as black to his horror realized he could not simultaneously save his queen at e4, his bishop at e7 and his knight at a6.

Although Djurhuus kept his mask well, losing this game in this way after less than two hours and within 22 moves must have been a shock for the very experienced and perfectionist Norwegian GM. Turov as always kept his mask completely intact, and after all can make a plus result out of this tournament if winning the last round as well.

Yes, this eight round saw surprisingly many crushing wins for white.

Another one was the game between GM Aloyzas Kveinys (2543) and IM Jovanka Houska (2410), as usually solid Houska fatally underestimated white's potential for a kingside attack in an Anti-Meran Semi Slav.

As black after weakening her kingside with h6 wasted a fatal tempo when playing Ba3-Bb4 before challenging white's center with the c5-break, white played Re3-Rg3 and smashed through well before 30 moves.



Houska black against Kveinys.

The big sharks steam upwards now, and Kveinys better late than never also joined the fight for the moneyprizes – while Houska only joined the group of shocked titleholders today.



Wallace - Svane

IM John Paul Wallace (2402) somehow succeeded to continue his heated chess war battle against Donchenko from yesterday, as he today got white against Donchenko's roommate Rasmus Svane (2487).

In a Classical French white first established a space advantage with e5 followed by f4 and h4, and then directed his knight to g5 to start a kingside attack.

Meanwhile black played Nb3 to threaten the white rook at a1 - but as white did not spend time upon moving the "offside rook", black did not spend any time to take it.

With Wallace again about to run short of time the game became very tactical, but strangely enough it still remained about in balance until white made a creative blunder with the bishop sacrifice 30.Bxe6+? Qxe6 31.Qxa7. True enough white was threatening mate at both g7 and h7, but he overlooked that black could cover both these squares and start a decisive counterattack with 31... Nxf6!. Svane however missed his golden chance in a position with only one good move.

Wallace went on to promote his f-pawn – and this time his extra queen was worth a full point.

Wallace has turned a difficult start into an undisputable plus result before last round, while Svane still has a pole out tournament.



Hauge black against Lie.

The game between IM Espen Lie (2460) and Lars Oskar Hauge (2330) was a 20-move draw, but still a very interesting game.

It started up with a French a la King's Indian advance in which black having exchanged two set of minor pieces looked healthy, as white after taking back with the rook at f1 had some problems about his king at e1.

As white played e5, threatening the black knight at f6, 14... Nc5? was a very creative reply. Still it was also an extremely dubious reply, as both players somehow during the game (and by the way during their analysis afterwards) missed that white after 15.exf6! Qc4 (threatening to win the white queen with 16... Nd3+ 17.cxd3 Qxc6) can save both his queen and the extra piece by 16.Rc1!.

As white instead played 15.b4? black after 15.--- Qc4 16.bxc5 had an interesting opportunity to play on with 16.--- Nd5, but his idea turned out to be 16.--- Qc3+ with a perpetual check. Just above expected for Hauge and somewhat below expected for Lie, following this short but still entertaining and instructive draw.

The game between Johan-Sebastian Christiansen (2207) and IM Timofey Galinsky (2427) was very interesting from a Norwegian point of view, as Christiansen probably could make an IM-norm with 1.5/2 in the final rounds. The start was promising as white got some space advantage from a Catalan-like English fianchetto opening, and probably could have got a clear advantage in the middle game if playing the critical center break d5 around move 17.



Christiansen - Galinsky

As white instead allowed black to realize his c5-break the position equalized. It still remained about in balance until white went for the wrong plan with a tactical 29.Bxh6? – realizing much too late that the reply 29.--- e5! won a piece for black.

As Christiansen fought on well while Galinsky made some inaccuracies the game lasted 85 more moves (!). Playing a bishop up in the rook and bishop endgame, black despite a reduced number of pawns was in control at least for the last 75 of them.

No IM-norm this time but still another good result for Christiansen, while Galinsky continues his nine rounds roller coaster.

The game between Sebastian Mihajlov (2197) and IM Torbjørn Ringdal Hansen (2469) was another important one, as Mihajlov still had IM-norm chances if winning this game with white. To tell the truth it was never really close. White true enough opened the c-file and established a space advantage when playing d5 in this Bogo Indian opening. But after parking a dominating knight on c5, black was clearly better for a few moves and then slightly better for many moves.

White got one final chance to play for a win just before 60 moves, as Mihajlov blundered his vital d6-pawn in the queen and minor piece endgame.

For some reason white still accepted a draw by repetition of checks afterwards.

Mihajlov in short made another draw against an IM after saving a difficult position today, and although he will not get any IM-norm at Fagernes this year, this highly talented 14 year old can be proud of his result.

Hansen is in danger of falling below 2450 tomorrow, and that definitely is the wrong direction as he still needs 2500 to complete his GM-title.

Fortunately he has not lost his joyful attitude to chess and life in general. Before the game Torbjørn with a smile used his right to ask the arbiter how many points he would need in the two final rounds to make a GM-norm – and laughed when the answer turned out to be “you now need about six points in the two final rounds”.

The young gentleman game between Odd Martin Guttulsrud (2206) and IM Nicolai Getz (2388) started as a closed Ruy Lopez. The position opened as white pseudo-sacrificed a piece with 16.Nxe5, but chances remained about balanced after white won back the piece at d4. White actually could have kept a small advantage if pseudo-sacrificing another piece at e4 two moves later. As white missed that chance black's all the more active knights took over the initiative, and black's advantage increased as he by tactical means advanced the e4-pawn via d3 to d2.

Due to the seventh rank pawn the queen and rook position after 40 moves was winning for black. Although missing a direct win with 45.--- Re8!, black a few moves later landed safely in a won piece endgame.

A jumpy tournament following this result seems likely to end up just around 50 % for both players.



Getz beating Guttulsrud with black.

Round eight was a hard fought one also in the **Open Norwegian Championship**, as all the first three boards got a winner in this group as well.



Board 1 (Hølleland – Bentsen) and 2 (E.Machlik - Laverton) in Open Norwegian Championship.

Back on the first board, Masfjorden's new chess star Sigve Hølleland (1871) made another strong result as white against fourth seeded Håkon Bentsen (2074).

True enough black first did well from the Meran duel in a Semi-Slav opening, and his decision to sacrifice an exchange at d2 in move 16 probably was correct.

As completing the kingside development with 18... Be7? afterwards was a much too slow plan for black, Hølleland however got the time needed to force a queen exchange with 19.Qd1! - after which white suddenly was clearly better.

Taking over the c-file and getting out the pieces, white went on to win the endgame without too many nervous moments.

As the last undefeated player in this group finally resigned after 68 moves, Bentsen was out of the fight for the top three prizes.

Hølleland on the other hand suddenly was odds one favorite to win the championship, as the Machlik siblings for once had a bad round.

14 year old Endre Machlik (1790) on the second board established a space advantage and for a while was slightly better as white against Christian Laverton (2080). From around move 30 black still had all the remaining opportunities in a rather closed position with queen, bishop, knight and six pawns on each side.

Under time pressure white made the fatal blunder at move 39, overlooking a tactical Nxe5! - winning the key pawn with a totally won position for black.

No one looked very surprised when Monika Machlik (1976) on the third board produced another jumpy game, although she was this time black against usually more reliable Terje Torgersen (1970).

For the second round in a row she however landed on the wrong foot and lost.

Playing e5-d4 and g4 white had a space advantage from this Aljechin opening, but as white hesitated too long black

came better with a promising queenside initiative in the middle game.

The game turned again as Monika lost her speed on the board when running short of time on the clock, and after 40 moves Torgersen had a winning attack. The storm turned one more time as white three moves later blundered his important f6-pawn by overlooking a tactical 44.--- Nxf6! - but not for long as 45.--- Nh5? (instead of 45.--- Kf7! with an unclear position) was a decisive mistake.



Torgersen beating M.Machlik with the white pieces.



Flaata - Ghaderi

Hølleland also got a helping hand from board four today: First rated Alexander Flaata (2111) never reached the first board in this tournament, although he saved a lost queen endgame into a draw against 13 year old Arman Ghaderi (1843).

As 17 year old Hølleland following this is leading with 7.0/8, a full point ahead of Endre Machlik and Christian Laverton, a draw as black against Torgersen tomorrow will be sufficient for an unshared first prize.