

THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT 7



GM-group

This messy GM-group suddenly had one man in the lead after round seven: Second rated GM Andrey Vovk is now the only man at 5.5/7. It came very well deserved as he today won in only 25 moves as black against IM Frode Urkedal – while first board Shankland-Romanov and third board Lie-Neiksans both were tight four hours draws.

Still no title norm chances, but two young Norwegians got a very good afternoon out of two interesting endgames – as IM Nicolai Getz calculated out GM Yuri Vovk while FM Lars Oskar Hauge squeezed GM Leif Erlend Johannessen.

First board with first rated GM Sam Shankland (2648) vs third rated GM Evgeny Romanov (2635) started with a closed and fairly balanced Ruy Lopez opening. After 18 moves the queenside suddenly blew up, and when the smoke cleared Shankland had an extra pawn. Winning chances for him still were far ahead, as black played with a pair of barking bishops. Queens were exchanged after 35 moves, and later black's bishops became too disturbing.

Draw agreed after 45 moves, as white returned the pawn and exchanged down to a dead drawn rook endgame with three kingside pawns on each side.



The top boards: Shankland – Romanov and Urkedal – A.Vovk

0-1 after 25 moves, as Andrey Vovk sacrificed back the exchange to reach a won and minor pieces endgame. The 24 year old Ukrainian GM won first prize in the new year tournament at Fagernes three months ago and might very well do the same now, but he will get a critical test as black against GM Evgeny Romanov tomorrow.

Second board with IM Frode Urkedal (2507) and GM Andrey Vovk (2638) started as a Dutch in which white played the provocative 2.Bg5, after which black hunted the bishop around to g3 with h6 and g5. That aggressive strategy is known to be risky for black, but worked out very well in this case.

14.g3? later was a mistake, as Urkedal overlooked or underestimated a very promising pawn sacrifice with 14.--- g4!. Black might have been wrong to take back

GM Kjetil A Lie (2535) versus GM Arturs Neiksans (2607) started up as a Sicilian with 3.Bb5+, in which white had slight pressure due to his strong outpost at d5, while black struggled with a backward pawn at d6.

Neiksans for the first time this tournament was in serious danger of losing, as Lie increased his advantage and got a promising pressure against the d6-pawn in the queen and rook endgame.

White probably did right to win a pawn with a tactical 35.Rxf7, although the queen endgame afterwards was no way trivial. White later missed the critical lines first when playing 39.Kh2?! instead of 39.Qf3!, and then when playing 41.Kg2?! instead of 41.Qc5! – and so the game was drawn by perpetual check after 47 moves.

Neiksans following this still is shared second at 5.0/7, while Lie with a performance around 2550 is still luring just behind at 4.5/7.



GM Kjetil A. Lie

GM Yuri Vovk (2611) and IM Nicolai Getz (2407) discussed a Catalan where white played too slowly, hence black took the initiative with 11...e5. Black appeared satisfied exchanging down to a drawish double rook endgame.

After 48 moves black had a pawn more and a passed pawn at g4, but white's advanced queenside majority still balanced the chances. Onlookers thought this looked like a draw, but wondered whether the 2400-IM would keep up his play all the way in, as the position was still possible to lose for both sides. Unexpectedly the 2600-GM instead collapsed – first allowing black's pawn to march to g2, and then allowing a rook sacrifice which promoted the pawn. Still tactically alert Getz of course immediately used his chance, and had no problems completing his attack with queen and rook versus two rooks.

The older Vovk brother following this is out of the struggle for the first prize, while Getz although too late for a GM-norm can still make a prize out of this.



GM Nick de Firmian

GM Nick de Firmian (2508) as white against IM Jovanka Houska (2387) and her Caro-Kann opening, played 2.c4 and reached a fairly balanced isolated pawn position.

After black exchanged a knight on c3, white looked slightly better in the hanging pawn position with pawns on c3 and d4.

Having exchanged two sets of minor pieces and placed the remaining bishop at b7, black still had a very solid position.

Following sensible moves from both players, a draw was agreed by a repetition of moves after 30 moves.



Oslo team mates GM Leif Erlend Johannessen (2497) and FM Lars Oskar Hauge (2393) discussed a Queen's Indian in which white's space advantage on the queenside first gave him a plus.

Black after f5 and Rf6 however succeeded getting some play on the kingside, and a tense struggle followed in the third hour.

32.--- Qa2? (threatening white's bishop on a3) was natural but still a blunder, as white could

have turned the tactics against black with 33.d6! and 34.dxc7. Instead white had to fight for a draw after giving up bishop and knight for rook and pawn.

As white was playing with two rooks and three pawns versus rook, two knights and three pawns, the general feeling after the time control was that white and his passed pawn on c7 should be able to save this. The variations still gave black a clear advantage, which before 50 moves turned into a win as he was able to block white's pawn on c7 while advancing his own passed pawn to e3.

Hauge following this win can make a performance above 2450 if winning both the final rounds. But firstly he following his slow start anyway has too few foreign opponents to make an IM-norm, and secondly he does not need any more such norms as he will anyway get the IM-title within next week.

IM Johan Salomon (2452) versus FM Vegar Gandrud (2300) was a symmetrical English opening in which white had a little more space, but black's active pieces probably balanced the chances. Black in the rook and bishop endgame even had a slight initiative for some moves before the first time control. After the first time control black exchanged the rooks and offered, which white immediately accepted as the bishop endgame was dead equal draw.

IM Nikita Meskovs (2469) versus Jens Hjort Kjølberg (2164) was a Nimzo-Indian Sämisch duel, in which black tried to trouble white's f3-e4-set up with Nh5 and f5. After the f-file opened there followed a double-edged position in which white after 19 moves had scattered pawns on a3, c3, c5 and e5, while black had all his remaining five pieces on the first rank. Trying to develop one of the pieces with 20.--- Bc8-d7? was a mistake, as white came clearly better after winning a pawn on b7. Defending with queen, knight and five pawns versus queen, knight and six pawns, black still had some drawing chances due to the pawn structure. Still it would have been a long uphill walk even without 30.--- Ne7? – after which black lost another pawn and jumped off the board.

IM Johan-Sebastian Christiansen (2401) and Lucas Ranaldi (2132) via 1.c4 b6 reached an Owen's defence line in which black got an active knight on f5 and did fine, as white refused to discuss the critical lines.

Although the opening was no success white gradually took over the initiative in the middle game, and after 24.f4 and 25.f5 got a direct kingside attack. After his move 30 white had a knight on f5 and a promising position, but the outcome still was far from given.

30.--- Bb7-c8?? however was a misunderstood try to kick the knight away from f5, as white could (and immediately did) play 31.Nxd6! with a decisive material win.



FM Johannes Haug (2267) as white against surprise man Joar Gullestad Pettersen (2062) chose a French Tarrasch line in which Bd6 followed by 0-0 is the normal plan for black around move 13-14.

Instead Bc5 followed by Kf8 actually worked out fairly well. g6 followed by Kg7 later on however was a serious misunderstanding, leaving black's king in a dangerous position. White instructively got a winning attack by

opening the diagonal a1-h8 for his bishop, and efficiently decided by a tactical 27.Re8!.

IM Petter Haugli (2244) and Trygve Dahl (2201) started up with 1.c4 f5 and another "Anglo-Dutch" duel. Haugli after the game considered his plan with 8.Rb1 and 9.b4 misunderstood.

True enough nothing more came out of white's queenside space. He still came much better as black's plan to open the kingside proved much more dangerous for his own king.

In a somewhat unusual attack Haugli after 25 moves intervened on d8 with his queen to hunt the white king from e8 to f7, then moved the queen to h8 – and then via g7, f6 and e7 returned it to d8, mating the black king on c8 after 33 moves!

57 year old Haugli following this win is well above his expected score, while 15 year old Dahl after falling off this carousel needs a strong spurt to save his ELO.



Anton Darnell (2110) versus Tor Fredrik Kaasen (2209) was a King's Indian looking all the more like a Benkő-gambit, as black's a- and b-pawn combined with his bishop in g7 gave him positional compensation for the pawn he had given up at b5.

Something went seriously wrong for white as he around move 23-27 had to give up first his a-pawn and then his b-pawn - and held captured his own knight at h1...

When white finally succeeded redeveloping the knight via f2, black's passed pawn on b3 was decisive in the rooks and knight endgame.

Andreas Fossan (2069), as white against WGM Anastasia Gutsko (2154) and her Nimzo-Indian opening, chose an ambitious Rubinstein set up.

Having spent 70 minutes for 17 moves, black by a f4-break succeeded in opening the kingside.

After placing her king on g7 black however proved able to cover up the f7-pawn, and positionally did very well due to her strong knight on e5.

Black appeared close to winning as she picked up white's key pawn with a tactical 23... Bxd5.

White however succeeded getting counterplay based upon his active pieces plus his advancing c-pawn.

In short the position was very double edged and interesting when a draw suddenly was agreed after 32 moves.



FM Richard Bjerke (2109) and Henrik Øie Løbersli (2134) discussed a Catalan line in which white regained the pawn black took at c4, and later came better partly due to his pair of bishops and partly due to his d4-pawn.

After castling long and breaking up the center with e5, black for some moves had an active position in the middle game.

White however had a dangerous attacking coming up against the black king on b8, and

efficiently crashed through by sacrificing a rook on a6 just before the time control.

58 year old Bjerke is doing very well with a performance above 2250, while 18 year old Løbersli will lose some ELO in this tournament following this fifth game loss.

15 year old FM Eivind Risting (2102) as white against 18 year old Monika Machlik (2055) went for a Classical Nimzo-Indian, in which the pair of bishops this time gave white a promising middle game pressure. After black played d5 a tense middle game struggle followed, pitting white's bishops on f3 and d4 against black's knight on c5 and e4.

While Monika again was about to run seriously short of time for 40 moves, her position fall apart as white kicked the knight away from c5 by a well timed b4-break. Black following this was a pawn down and in deep trouble when she overlooked a tactical 37.Qxh6+ (to be followed by 38.Qxg7 mate).



WFM Anita Grønnestad (1957) versus Edit Machlik (2056) was a symmetrical English, in which white's pair of bishops first gave her a slight pressure.

Black by sound means gradually equalized in a dynamic position and then won a pawn following a too loose d5-advance from white.

Just before 40 moves white won back the pawn by a tactical rook exchange. Probably black did well to return the pawn, as she

afterwards had both the better bishop and the more active king in the bishop endgame.

Anita however found a creative defence idea, exchanging off the bishops to reach a pawn endgame in which white promoted on a8 immediately after black promoted on f1.

The remaining queen endgame, in which white had a h-pawn and black a c-pawn and g-pawn, probably should have been a draw.

With five minutes left on both clocks, Edit however speeded up and made a series of practically strong moves. Anita failed to pass such an endgame defence test after nearly six hours of play, and resigned as black's c-pawn was about to promote after 76 moves.

IM-group

In the closed IM-group, three out of five games were drawn this round. Still the group somehow became even more polarized. While leading GM Aloyzas Kveinys was satisfied with a short draw as black against FM Sebastian Mihajlov, GM Mars Narciso Dublan won in convincing style against GM Heikki Westerinen, and GM Stellan Brynell won in a patient style against Eric Moskow. Following this the three top rated GMs are sharing the lead at 5.5/7, without having lost a game so far.

Fourth seeded FM Joachim B. Nilsen made a rather careful draw as white against FM Erlend Mikalsen, and is doing very well at 5.0/7. Still, he needs 1.0/2 in the end to make his first IM-norm. 15 year old Sondre Merkesvik survived a difficult start against Sheila Sahl and is still doing very well, but lost his last chance for an IM-norm after today's draw. Eight round, including the key game Kveinys-Brynell, will be coming up very soon.



Room mates FM Joachim B. Nilsen (2397) and FM Erlend Mikalsen (2333) tested a rather solid English fianchetto, in which white is ahead on the queenside and black on the kingside.

White looked slightly better after exchanging the queens, but found nothing better than a draw by repetition of moves with two rooks, bishop, knight and six pawns on each side.

Nilsen is just out of top three following this draw, but much more important still ahead

of schedule for his first IM-norm. His dilemma before this game was that he needed 1.5/3 from white against Mikalsen, white against Mihajlov and black against Brynell...

Following this sensible draw, the big question still is whether he can trust his ability not to lose with black against the GM in round nine. If not, then he must try to win as white against the FM in round eight.

Mikalsen by the way still has a disappointing result, but has succeeded in improving both his result and his play the last two rounds.

In the GM duel between Marc Narciso Dublan (2549) and Heikki Westerinen (2319), both players left theory to discuss a somewhat original Modern line with 6.h4 h5. Black spent 60 minutes for the first 13 moves, but still came worse as white after c4-d5-e4 dominated the center zone.

Dublan in an inspired mood sacrificed his b-pawn to increase pressure against black's king on e8.

As the king could no longer survive on this square, black castled after 20 moves. But as the king could no longer survive on g8 either, he stopped the clock after 26 moves.

72 year old Westerinen unfortunately is still playing well below his usual strength this tournament.

42 year old Dublan on the other hand has found back to his usual strength after a slow start, and is sharing first place at 5.5/7 before the two final rounds.

Slightly disappointedly, the game between FM Sebastian Mihajlov (2387) and GM Aloyzas Kveinys (2534) was drawn after 10 not that exciting moves in a Queen's Gambit Tarrasch. White was slightly better and black very solid in the final position. Regarding Kveinys, we will not know until after last round whether a draw in round seven was a good or bad move. In the short run, he lost his unshared lead, but is not behind GM colleagues Brynell and Dublan before facing them in his two final rounds.



Mihajlov on the other hand lost his last theoretical chance for a norm when accepting Kveinys' offer, but draw against a 2500-GM might still have been a good move if his goal is now a plus result.

GM Stellan Brynell (2417) a white against Eric Moskow (2116) entered an Accepted Queen's Gambit in which the queens were exchanged at d1 before ten moves – leaving a close to symmetric and apparently drawish position. Following a tactical knight exchange with 15.--- hxg5 16.Bxe5 white got slightly the better pawn structure, but black's active pieces still kept him well inside the game. 24.--- g4?! however was a dubious pawn sacrifice. White later instructively activated his pieces, and black chose a respectful resignation as he after 34 moves was about to lose a second pawn with a lost position.

Moskow makes many good moves but still struggles to complete his games, while Brynell undefeated at 5.5/7 now shares first place.



WIM Sheila Barth Sahl (2195) hit with a preparation against Sondre Merkesvik (2230) and his Aljeckhine opening. Probably in accordance with white's clever planning, black exchanged queens at e2 instead of trying a greedy and critical 13.--- QxRh1!?. White following this won an exchange, as black could not stop 15.Nc7+ followed by 16.Nxa8. 18.Bf4xe5?! probably was dubious as black later got an active pair of bishops, but still

white with an exchange for a pawn looked clearly better around move 19-25.

Now lagging some 45 minutes behind on the clock, Sheila however made some mistakes.

39.--- Bxh4?? actually was a blunder from black, still having more than 40 minutes left on the clock.

Having less than 40 seconds left on the clock, white very understandably missed the elegant attacking win which 40.a5! could have been. After the time control black following this intermezzo had rook, knight and four pawns versus two rooks and two pawns. White still was closer to winning chances. As black fought on well and succeeded exchanging the remaining white pawns, a draw was agreed after 49 moves.

Merkesvik lost his last chance for an IM-norm with this draw, but at 3.5/7 he is still scoring well above expected. Sheila at 1.5/7 is now fighting to save her ELO – but still fighting every round!

Open Norwegian Championship

On the first board of the **Open Norwegian Championship**, first rated Johannes Kvisla (2253) today took a long step towards an unshared first prize as he won a tight six-hour battle against fourth rated Christian Laverton (2096).

White had an edge from the opening and suddenly looked close to winning as black blundered a pawn in the middle game. Laverton fought on well, but in the end still failed to save the endgame a passed pawn down. Kvisla neatly finished off the game early in the sixth hour, sacrificing his rook for a bishop to let his bishop escort in the passed h-pawn.



Bentsen - Maloberti

Kvisla now at an amazing 6.5/7 increased his lead to a full point, as the French challenger David Maloberti (2021) failed to win despite some advantage against Håkon Bentsen (2058) on the second board.

Maloberti as black had the better preparation for this French Tarrasch duel and came a pawn up in the middle game. Bentsen however won back the pawn, and steadily defended the double rook endgame into a draw.

Maloberti at 5.5/7 following this share the second place with second seeded FM Ward Al-Tarbosh (2160), today picking up two pawns and winning the rook endgame without too many problems against Arne Hagesæther (2081).

Other and more unexpected members of this 5.5 points community are Yonne Tangelder (1925) and August Berntsen-Øybø (1862). Tangelder today surprisingly won a messy game against still too unpredictable Endre Machlik (2076), while 15 year old Berntsen-Øybø won about as expected with black against Erik Grindbakken (1568).

Third rated Terje Lund (2157) following way too many draws cannot reach first board or first prize, but might after all candidate for a money prize as he today succeeded defeating the very talented 12 year old Afras Mansoor (1747) with knight and four pawns versus knight and three pawns.

Several lower rated players are still scoring far above expected. One of them is the young Stavanger woman Aina Marie Svendsen (1690), today getting another surprise win against Thomas Nyland (2018).

Following another highly entertaining round in the Open we are already looking forward to the second last one – when the top board pairings will be August Berntsen-Øybø against Johannes Kvisla and Ward Al-Tarbosh against David Maloberti.

All photos: Tom Eriksen