



Tradewise Gibraltar Chess Festival 2017

Monday 23 January - Thursday 2 February 2017

Round 2 Report: *Wednesday 25 January 2017 - by John Saunders (@JohnChess)*

Bad Day at Black Rock

Last year's winner Hikaru Nakamura, Mickey Adams, Yu Yangyi, Nikita Vitiugov and Arkadij Naiditsch are now the sole possessors of a 100% score to go with a 2700+ rating at the end of the second round of play at the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters on Tuesday as their elite colleagues struggled to do better than draw, and in one calamitous case, to lose against more modest opposition. In total 37 players are still on 2/2.

I couldn't resist borrowing the title of the old Spencer Tracy for today's second round of the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters as it seems so apt, both on the board and off. The day started normally enough, as I enjoyed a delicious breakfast in the Caleta Hotel and then went for my daily constitutional in bright sunshine along the road to the south of the venue, which I have now dubbed 'Grandmaster Promenade'. Whilst walking down the road, idly peering at the flora and fauna of Gibraltar with my binoculars, Natalia Zhukova said 'hi' whilst jogging, Boris Gelfand stopped to chat, and Hou Yifan and her mother passed by. You meet a better class of chess player along Grandmaster Promenade.

Around 10am I returned to the hotel and noticed that it seemed less well lit than usual. Indeed, the stairwells were positively Stygian, and I had to feel my way with my foot to find the steps in the unaccustomed gloom. I toyed with the idea that this had something to do with the transition from bright sunlight outside and the failure of my photochromic spectacles to readjust but it was much more serious than that. In my room there was no power at all, no internet, no nothing.

It was only when I rejoined my press room colleagues later that I discovered this was not a local problem but that the whole of Gibraltar was without electricity. I am familiar with the concept of a computer being 'down' (as people like to say these days), or perhaps a house, a street, or even an area, but a whole country being bereft of electricity is a new and wholly unwelcome experience. To quote a local news channel, "a contractor in the area of Her Majesty's Naval Base had cut through a main interconnecting cable. The damage was extensive as the cable connects the North to the South." Well, at least that was me off the hook – I was starting to worry that this national crisis had been caused by me fiddling with the table lamp in my room the night before.

Hopefully this little digression may go some way to explaining why the tournament has suffered a few technical gremlins today, as various pieces of delicate electronic equipment shut down by the power loss have stuttered back into life again.

One of the tournament's super-GMs also suffered some sort of power failure this afternoon, in the vicinity of his cranium. I offered visual evidence in the @GibraltarChess Twitter stream for those interested. Vasyl Ivanchuk was close to winning against Ori Kobo of Israel when he overstepped the time limit at move 40. He thought he had made 40 moves but his opponent's scoresheet indicated that only 39 had been played. A check by the arbiters showed that Ivanchuk had accidentally left the entry for move 24 blank at the bottom of the left-hand column of his scoresheet and so had played one move fewer than he thought he had. So it was certainly a black day for the hapless Chucky.

We aged Brits with long memories were tickled by the pairing Short-Bellin on board 59. When I arrived at their board with camera at the ready, they were debating when they first crossed swords and thought it was in the mid-1970s, and also their most recent confrontation, which they thought was around 1987. I asked if their Gibraltar game was perhaps the long-awaited play-off to decide the 1979 British Championship, when Robert triumphed over Nigel via sum of opponents'

scores or some such unsatisfactory method. Unfortunately they were playing unplugged so I can't yet quote any details of the play, other than to report that "youth triumphed" (at least that is how Nigel referred to his victory later).

By and large, round two was an attritional struggle, as the 2700+ guys strove to overcome opposition in the 2450-2500 spectrum. Caruana, Vachier-Lagrave, Svidler and Topalov ended up conceding half points and it was only by dint of much effort and time – and of course considerable technical virtuosity – that Nakamura and Adams won long endgames. Caruana and MVL might have done worse and seemed to achieve draws by reputation rather than repetition. This strengthens the feeling that the gap in class between the elite and those rated 200 points below them is narrower than the bare numbers would indicate. It is only in extra-strong opens such as the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters that this notion can be truly put to the test.

Rather than deconstructing the intricacies of the Nakamura or Adams endgames, well played though they were, let us have a look at a couple more bad days (for the losers) on Black Rock. The first one is an example of a player trying to be ultra-cautious but only succeeding in making a disastrous blunder (much as in Lombaers-Short in round 1).

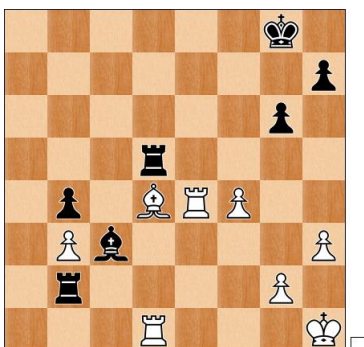
Tradewise Gibraltar Masters, Round 2
B-D.Deac (2572) - M.J.Herman (2383)



In a King's Indian Defence type of position, Black opts to move his queen away from any possible danger on the same diagonal as the bishop on e3. **20...Qb4??** 20...a4 is a perfectly reasonable alternative, when 21.Rb1 Qb4 is only slightly worse for Black. **21.Ncb5!** Now the queen is trapped behind enemy lines. **21...cxb5 22.Bd2 bxc4 22...Qa3 23.Nxb5** is terminal. **23.Bxb4** and Black staggered on for a further eight pointless moves... **1-0**

The following game was a notable scalp for the Mongolian IM Tuvshintugs Batchimeg but her opponent, Indian GM Babu Lalith stood considerably better when his bad day materialised.

Tradewise Gibraltar Masters, Round 2
T.Batchimeg (2390) - M.R. Babu Lalith (2587)



35.Kh2 An innocuous looking move but actually a sneaky trick. **35...Kf7?? 36.Bxc3! 1-0** White snares a free piece. Black previously had a defence to this move by virtue of ...Rxd1 being check, but 35.Kh2 had negated this option. **36...Rxd1 37.Bxb2**

A selection of photos of round two can be downloaded from my Flickr account at <https://flic.kr/s/aHskMDUvP1>

Video footage and interviews from today's round are available to embed from our [YouTube Channel](#).

Report Ends

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