



THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT **1**



If you think this GM group with 18 players and a median ELO of 2483 is somehow too small and too strong at the same time, you are somehow perfectly right...

To make the tournament attractive enough for title candidates, the organizer invited nine GMs out of whom five were above 2600. (Compare the very strong Rilton Cup in Stockholm, including four players above 2600 among 94 players, with a median ELO of 2321.) As it turned out way too few Norwegian title candidates wanted to play such a strong chess tournament during the final days of 2015 and the first days of 2016, at least in Norway. The result became a too small and too strong GM group.

Needless to say the tournament offers excellent chances for the few available title norm candidates. First round, including the first meeting between two GMs (!?), was an exciting start during which three Norwegians from the lower half produced surprising draws – while both the top rated foreign GMs failed to win.

The first board game between Norwegian GM Torbjørn Ringdal Hansen (2472) and Israelian GM Evgeny Postny (2670) was a tense five-hour battle, although true enough a somewhat dry one.

It started up with a closed Ruy Lopez, reaching a symmetric center structure with e4 versus e5 as white played 12.dxe5. Although white got a pair of bishops, black with the better development and a space advantage on the queenside appeared closer to an edge around move 15-20. Black later kept a slight initiative through all the following exchanges.

Due to his passed b-pawn, Postny still played on for a win in the queen endgame after the time control. Ringdal Hansen however defended by sound means, and after 48 moves sacrificed a pawn on e6 to force a draw by repetition of checks within a few moves.



The second board game between Ukrainian GM Yuri Vovk (2626) and Norwegian IM Nicolai Getz (2410) also started as a closed Ruy Lopez line, but this one opened and soon became very tactical as white played c3 followed by d4. Playing against a backward pawn on d6 with slightly the more active pieces, white put some pressure around move 18-23. 24.Nc6? followed by 25.Qg5?! however was an overambitious plan, inviting black in for counterplay in a tactically loaded position.

Getz happily hung on to that train, and following tactical exchanges a drawish endgame with queen, bishop and three pawns versus queen, knight and three pawns came on board. Forced to exchange queens as well, Yuri Vovk offered a draw at move 41. Getz bravely refused to test out the value of his passed a-pawn in the endgame with knight and three pawns versus bishop and three pawns, but as white could easily exchange further pawns black offered a few moves later on.

The younger brother, GM Andrey Vovk (2617), made a much more convincing start as he won in only 17 moves as black against 16 year old Norwegian FM Sebastian Mihajlov (2335). After 10 moves black was perfectly fine in a loaded Marocky line of a King's Indian Four Pawns opening. Then white simply blundered with 11.Be3?, overlooking 11.--- Qxb2! > 12.Qxb2 Nxd3+ followed by 13.--- Nxb2... White resigned a bit early only six moves later, but otherwise would have been two pawns down with his king still stuck on e1.

Hungarian GM Peter Prohaszka (2607) in his first game at Fagernes discussed an English opening with the 15 year old Norwegian Sondre Merkesvik (2190). White spent 35 minutes for the first ten moves, but still came more than 20 minutes ahead of black in a complex and somewhat Grünfeld-like position. Maybe 12.Bxc6 followed by 13.d5 was not white's objectively best continuation, but anyway it gave him a very promising initiative for the pawn. Giving up an exchange on f8 to exchange queens on a5 was creative but probably still not the best try from black, as he soon drifted into a rather hopeless endgame with rook and bishop against two active rooks.

The now Czech GM Igors Rausis (2600) is an old friend of Norway making a comeback this tournament, and made a convincing win out of an apparently complex game as black against Ukraine WGM Anastasia Gutsko (2177).

Following another closed Ruy Lopez opening duel, the middle game was reported unclear as white had some attack to compensate black's pair of bishops. Rausis however instructively gave up his bishop on white's knight on f5 to stop the attack, and then efficiently opened up the kingside against white's king. Making all the better calculations in the second half of this game, Rausis in the final position after 32 moves was winning decisive material and mating.

Hungarian GM Gergely Antal (2565) had a longer and more hard-fought working day as white against the 13 year old Tromsø talent Tor Fredrik Kaasen (2168).

The opening was a Sicilian with 4.Qxd4 in which black got the pair of bishops, but had to struggle with a backward pawn on d6. Both players spent a lot of time around move 10-20, in a complex middle game pitting white's pair of knights against black's pair of bishops. White gradually build up a pressure, and although creative black's counterblow with 23.--- f5? 24.exf5 d5 left most of the smoke in his own face.

Still in a creative mood Kaasen gave up his queen for rook and bishop – and coolly left the board to watch other games while having three minutes left for eleven moves. Antal however remained unshaken, and had no problems to demonstrate a decisive kingside attack before Kaasen ran out of time.



Among several Norwegian teenagers playing interesting games against 2500-opponents today, 15 year old Lucas Ranaldi (2140) was the only one to make a draw of it.

His game against IM Frode Urkedal (2507) started as a Nimzo-Indian Rubinstein line, in which white grabbed some space by a c5 advance. Hitting back with the thematic e5-break in the center, black had no problems equalizing.

Although black due to his strong square on e4 later kept a slight initiative, he due to Ranaldi's accurate defence had a hard time making further progress. Black eventually won a pawn as he accepted a queen exchange after 32 moves, but the rook and bishop endgame still was very drawish due to opposite-colored bishops. Eager to get his final GM-norm, Urkedal stubbornly fought on until he ran out of pawns, but in the end after 60 moves and five and a half hour still had to accept the draw.

The game between Serbian GM Milos Pavlovic (2496) and Norwegian Daniel Nordquelle (2115) also was a tense five hours battle, in which the very talented 13 year old gave the 51 year old GM a hard fight.

From a King's Indian Advance line the opening transposing into Reti, and then into some kind of Queen's Pawn opening as white played d4. Black went for a Dutch Stonewall set up with d5 and f5, and play became tight as white tried to wall it down with e3-f3-e4.

15.--- e5? probably was overambitious from a black point of view, as white within a few moves won a pawn without losing the initiative. As Pavlovic spent much time and made some inaccurate moves, black was hanging on all the way into the knight endgame.

Still a chronic time spender, Pavlovic had only eight seconds left for his move 40. This time he however needed only one second to find the move, and probably the knight endgame was just winning for white.

Finally, the game between Edit Machlik (2034) and GM Matthew Turner (2493) was a short, intense and interesting Classical Nimzo-Indian duel.

18 year old Edit played too fast as she exchanged queens on f6 and then exchanged pawns with 13.dxc5? bxc5, as the b-file soon gave black a promising pressure. Seen from the surface the rest of the game was pretty much one way driven, as Turner instructively increased the queenside pressure and won decisive material after 24 moves.

The final knight maneuver was a bit funny, as black with decisive effect transferred his knight from b3 to b3 via a1. Still the GM was way too careless when playing 16.--- Rfb8?, allowing a tactical 17.b4! – intending 17.--- axb4 18.axb4 Rxb4 19.Ra2 when black is unable to save both his knight on a5 and his bishop on a6... The Scotch GM still of course won the game well deserved, as black dominated the game and as white missed the one chance she had to turn the tide and reach a clear advantage.

The open group including 21 players is not much bigger than the GM-group, but much more uneven with almost 1000 Elo-points in between seeded number 1 and seeded number 21. Consequently, all games in round one had an obvious favorite. The four players above 2000 in the end all won. Still the players from the first half were very lucky to get away with 8.5-1.5 tonight, as several players from the second half missed chances to produce game sensations.

The biggest drama was the first board meeting between FM Ward Al-Tarbosh (2204) and Jens Ingebretsen (1710). A former member of the Olympic team of Syria, Al-Tarbosh is the odds one favorite to win this group. Still he stumbled from the starting blocks, and after a lively French exchange line he was – correct – reported lost in the third hour.

The position remained complex as both players castled short and then went for a kingside attack, but black with a queen on h2 and a knight on g4 had the much more dangerous attack around move 20-25, and could have decided by a very strong but also very difficult 23.--- Ne3+!!.

Instead black chose the wrong plan, and 25.--- Re6? allowed white to snatch two knights for one rook with 26.Rxg4. Maybe black had some drawing chances in the endgame, but Al-Tarbosh was definitely back in the driving seat. In the end he demonstrated his class as he neatly decided the endgame with bishop, knights and four pawns against rook and four pawns. No goal but still a very promising start game by eleven year old Jens as black against the top rated.

Second seeded Håkon Bentsen (2037) was not satisfied with getting black against the strongly underrated eleven year old Afras Mansoor (1709), but still won this Queen's Gambit Exchange duel in an apparently convincing style.

Black was probably better after white exchanged his bishop for a knight on g6 just after the opening moves, and white definitely lost touch when blundering an exchange with 18.Ng3?. Returning the exchange to play a pawn up with a sound advantage probably qualifies as sound practical judgement from a black point of view. Still the invitation for a queen exchange with 42.--- Qd5? was a mistake, as white could have saved a draw by a fortress defence in the pawn endgame after 43.Qxd5! cxd5 44.g4!. Missing that chance, Mansoor instead soon lost the queen endgame.

Stein Tholo Bjørnsen (2019) as white against Amalie Merkesvik (1600) played 1.Nc3 followed by 2.e4, transposing into a rare fianchetto line of a Vienna opening. After an early queen exchange, white's two rooks in the g-file gave him pleasant pressure. Amalie for a while defended well but then became too passive, and white's machine gun pair of bishops soon cleared the board after he had won two minor pieces for a rook. Stein has made remarkable progress as a chess player in 2015, all the more impressive as he is now totally blind. Reportedly having 52 wins and five draws among his 57 tournament games before this tournament, Stein is probably still underrated and definitely a hot candidate for top three.

Lars Martin Krogseth (1599) and Tor Wetle Hoem (2004) meanwhile discussed a Sicilian with 3.c3, transposing into an isolated pawn position in which black had a sound pressure against the white pawn on d4. Having sacrificed the d4-pawn somewhat too loose, white anyway was in deep trouble when blundering an exchange after 23 moves.

Kai-Roger Johansen (1997) and Håkon Myrheim (1595) played an English line in which black with his pair of bishops probably was fine all of the time. Definitely he looked better without queens and with an extra pawn, after white overlooked a tactical 18.--- Nxd5!.

Running short of time for 40 moves 15 year old Håkon however lost first the thread, then one pawn and then one more pawn. After black passed the time control with a margin of only four seconds, the question was whether white could make any use of his extra pawn in an endgame with rooks and different colored bishop. That is, until Kai-Roger lost his concentration and blundered the bishop. Håkon after this probably could have played for a win, but fearing white's two connected queenside pawns he instead chickened out and sacrificed back the bishop to reach a drawn rook endgame. Despite being virtually blind, Kai-Roger demonstrated great fighting spirit and played on until move 77 (and for some 10 moves too much) with rook and a-pawn versus rook and h-pawn.

59 year old Leif Wærstad (1572) and 18 year old Alseit Kizatbay (1905) tested out a symmetric Grünfeld-Indian line in which white played too slow, soon giving black a strong initiative.

The older Kizatbay brother instructively activated his pieces first on the dark squares, and then on the dark and white squares, until winning an exchange and the game just after 30 moves.

"A very deserved loss" according to chess gentleman Leif.

Bjørn Robertsen (1893) and Ida Landsverk (1377) meanwhile discussed a Benkö gambit in which white was a pawn up, while black had some standard compensation due to her bishop on g7 combined with the open a- and b-files. Black's apparently active rook on b4 however was left stranded after white played 21.Nb5 followed by e4, and 12 year old Bjørn went on to win the game in a greedy and grown up way after picking up an exchange with 24.Bd2.

The meeting between ten year old Ariza Hina (1364) and twelve year old Abyl Kizatbay (1877) was an original Sicilian duel, in which white went for a Grand Prix attack on the kingside with f4, while black hit back on the queenside with 2.--- a6 and 3. --- b5.

Black's queenside attack proved more important than white's counterplay against the black d5-pawn, and black soon demonstrated a winning attack after he picked up white's key pawn on d4.

Olav Erikstad (1821) and Mats Nærheim (1356) investigated a Sicilian Alapin line in which white got a pair of bishops and some space advantage due to his e5-pawn.

Having the better pawn structure and a healthy bishop on d5, black after 20 moves looked fine.

The game remained double edged and the outcome open as white gave up one of his a-pawns to go for a kingside attack. Then black however blundered a piece with 25.--- Nd4?!, overlooking 25.Qd3! with a highly unpleasant d-file pin – and white of course had no problems winning the rook and bishops endgame with an extra bishop.

Sturle Hånes (1214) versus Lars Erik Brobakken (1755) was a positional Caro-Kann duel, in which white with a knight on e5 probably was better in the middle game. Black proved able to exchange away the dangers, and in the rook endgame looked slightly better as white's pawn on e5 now was weakening. Black in turned helpfully exchanged down to a dangerous pawn endgame, after which white helpfully offered a draw in a probably won position.

And in case anyone wonders what happened with the talented twelve year old Isak Sjøberg (1963), he requested a walk over draw in the first round as he and his parents arrived one day delayed. Isak will be in, and all the rest back, for a very exciting round two the afternoon of December 28!

Pictures: Tom Eriksen