

Fagernes Chess International 2019

THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT

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GM-A

With an ELO difference around 280-400 points in all games, players from the upper half of the rating list scored an overwhelming 19.5-1.5 in the first round. Still the round lasted 5 hours, 59 minutes and 57 seconds with many dramatic moments. And although all ten GMs won their games before midnight, several of them had a shaky evening.

Compared to last year's GM-A the median ELO this time dropped just below 2300. On the other hand the top is even stronger with four players rated above 2600 and seven above 2560. With ten GMs among 42 players, chances for title norms should be excellent for all available candidates.

The ten GMs on the top boards at the end of the day had made a 10-0 score, but not without exciting moments.

First rated Anton Demchenko (2661) played black in an old Sicilian Scheveningen line against the very young FM Trygve Dahl (2275). Before 15 moves the Russian star had sacrificed the d6-pawn and exchanged queens. He still had full compensation due to his active pair of bishops. Without the queens black still got a dangerous queenside attack against white's king on b1, by opening the b- and c-files for his rooks.

Black anyway was winning when white blundered and resigned after 34 moves.

Meanwhile second-rated GM Evgeny Alekseev (2649) as white against the also very young FM Daniel Nordquelle (2264) got a positional pressure from the relatively slow Queen's pawn opening, after black helpfully exchanged on c4 and d4 to give white two hanging center pawns under favourable circumstances.

The backward e6-pawn soon came under attack after black weakened his position with f5, and playing with an all the more powerful pair of bishops white completed his attack after 32 moves.



GM Evgeny Postny

Fourth seeded GM Evgeny Postny (2612) of Israel also won convincingly as white against our Danish chess friend Morten Andersen (2223). After the c- and d-pawns were exchanged white remained ahead in development and kept strong pressure from this Catalan position. Following a tactical queen exchange black was left to defend a positional nightmare with passive pieces and inferior pawn structure.

Postny instructively picked up a weak pawn on c6 and won the rook endgame in the third hour – probably without his pulse ever passing 90.

Sixth rated GM Evgeny Romanov (2576) has dropped below 2600 following some disappointing results this spring, but still won in only 23 moves as white against FM Andre Nielsen (2201). Black appeared healthy from this rather slow Reti opening, but 13... Nd7? was a blunder as white could (and did) simply cash in an exchange on e8 with 14. Bd5+ followed by 15. Bf7.

Nielsen in desperation gave up his fianchetto bishop on g7 to win back the exchange on a1, but this just shortened the pain as white within a few moves got a killing attack in the long diagonal a1-h8.

Top rated Norwegian player this year is GM Frode Urkedal (2513), winning about as fast as expected with the white pieces against Pål Røyset (2167). Røyset tested out a provocative 3... h6?! in a Queen's Gambit Declined, and white got a promising edge in the resulting isolated pawn position. Advancing the isolated pawn from d5 to d4 in this case only increased white's piece activity, and so did a queen exchange on e2. 1-0 after 25 moves, as black struck by positional cramps blundered a piece.



GM Benjamin Arvola Notkevich

The other Norwegian GM, Benjamin Arvola Notkevich (2495), is back on his favourite tournament arena with a new title after making GM-norms here in both 2017 and 2018. He apparently did not have too much from the Catalan opening as white against Håkon Bentsen (2155), and black still had a fairly solid position after 19 moves. Destroying the pawn structure with 20... bxa4?! however was a serious misunderstanding, as the following queen exchange soon left white with two very active rooks. Notkevich creatively sacrificed a pawn with 26. e6! to open the seventh rank for his rooks, and won by attack within ten more moves. Curiously, the players met in the first round with the same result last year.

Swedish GM Erik Blomqvist (2496) also had a more or little less convincing first working day as black against veteran FM Richard Bjerke (2156). Black took over the c-file which white had opened in a closed Catalan, and got the better pawn structure with sound pieces after white played e4. Allowed to exchange of all the rooks, white still had fair drawing chances with queen, bishop, knight and six pawns on each side after 22 moves. Snatching a pawn with 24.Nxa7?? however was far too optimistic from white, and although black made a mistake not to insert Qe1+ before Nd5 in his reply, he still won decisive material within a few moves.

The three GMs still in play after three and a half hour got a much more demanding evening. GM Evgeny Vorobiov (2565) against unpredictable young Andreas Skotheim (2182) first did fine as Black in an English fianchetto line, establishing a space advantage with e5-e4. White however came better as he after 10 moves was allowed to pseudo-sacrifice a piece on the e4-pawn, winning back the black bishop on c5 with an initiative. The position with queen, rook, bishop and six pawns on each side after 22 moves appeared very balanced, and so did the endgame with queen, bishop and six pawns on each side after 26 moves. The bishop endgame should have been drawish if white had exchanged queens on b6 after 27 moves, but white understandably kept the queens on as black had the more open king. That decision still proved disastrous as Skotheim running short of time in a still complex position was just outnumbered in calculations: Vorobiov efficiently advanced his queenside pawn majority while turning the attack against white's king before 40 moves.



Vitenberg vs Turov

Vorobiov's travel companion, last year's co-winner Maxim Turov (2584), also had an interesting four hours battle as black against a young Norwegian. Norwegian Junior Champion Aviv Vitenberg (2203) for a long time kept a rough balance in a messy Queen's Gambit Declined line, in which black starts a kingside attack with h6-g5 and then castles long. 20.--- Bxg3! was a necessary, interesting, promising but still double-edged bishop

sacrifice from the GM, playing on in an open position with three pawns for a piece.

As white had the more airy king, exchanging off the queens a few moves later on was a surprise from black, and although white had a poor pawn structure the endgame appeared unclear with two rooks, knight and three pawns versus two rooks and six pawns.

Black sacrificed a pawn to establish three connected passed pawns on the queenside, but after 38 moves white still had fair drawing chances with rook, knight and two pawns versus rook and four pawns.

Vitenberg however had only a few seconds left on the clock, and 39.Kc2?? followed by 40.Nf3? was a decisive mistake after which black could march on with his pawns. Vitenberg managed his move 40 with one second left on the clock, but the extra hour only helped him to realize the position was now hopeless.



WGM Olga Dolzhikova

Third rated Ukrainian GM Andriy Vovk (2616) was the last man sitting among the GMs today, and after nearly six hours still won a little lucky as black against WGM Olga Dolzhikova (2231).

The opening was a positional Sicilian Alapin, and the middle game proved slightly better for white due to black's slight awkward king on f7. White got a pleasant space advantage after advancing her pawn to c5 and probably was close to winning around move 30.

34.--- Bd6!? was a creative counterblow from black, which white should have cooled down with 35.g3! instead of entering tactical exchanges with 35.cxd6?.

The knight endgame with five pawns on each side after 40 moves still was slightly better for white due

to her more active king, but Vovk fought on well and came up with counter play against the white kingside pawns.

The tide gradually turned, but the remaining endgame with f- and h-pawns versus g- and h-pawns still should have been a draw. Sacrificing the h-pawn to bring home the king to the kingside was a sufficient drawing plan, as Dolzhikova had seen the decisive point about breaking up the black kingside pawns with 66.f4!.

She however had spent much too much time at that stage, and around move 70 both players missed a win for black. As white only needed to sacrifice her knight for the black h3-pawn, 74.Ne3+! still would have been sufficient for a draw.

Dolzhikova instead stumbled in one of the last hurdles with 74.Nxf2??, hoping for 74.--- Kxf2?? 75.Kxh3 - but overlooking the elegant 74.--- h2! with a queen to move in.

The most obvious GM-norm candidate in this group is the colorful Norwegian IM Lars Oskar Hauge (2472), scoring his first norm in the Norwegian League a month ago.

Handling the black stones versus Aleksander Lindbøl (2139), Hauge in his first round gradually took over the initiative in a heavyweight Italian duel, in which all 32 pieces were still on board after 23 moves.

Exchanging the e4 pawn on d5 then was a helpful mistake from white in a crumbling position. Seven moves later white chose an early resignation, as black had won a pawn with a pair of bishops and all the more active pieces.

Erik Santarius (2411) was an FM playing for a GM-norm in the final rounds of last year's Fagernes tournament, but returned this year as an IM. The start looked a bit dry against talented young Norwegian Elham Abdrlauf (2123), as black got the chance to play a Catalan with the troublesome light-square bishop outside the pawn chain at f5. 16.--- b5?! although creative was a bit loose, but still worked out fairly well as white after 17.cxb5 cxb5 18.d5! did not want to test the critical 19.dxe6!?

Following this white had the much better pawn structure and black an extra pawn in the endgame with two rooks, knight and five pawns versus two rooks, bishop and six pawns after 25 moves. Black had fair drawing chances but became too eager when sacrificing his pawn on d5 to get his rook around via c1 to a1.

35.--- Bxa2! still could have given some chances, while white instructively demonstrated the knight versus bishop endgame to be won after 35.--- Rxa2? 36.Rxa2 Bxa2.

In short, all the top twelve boards somehow in the end were won by the higher rated player. The two next games, on the other hand, were not won by anyone and the higher rated player was in serious danger of losing both.



Edit Macklik vs IM Erlend Mikalsen

The tournament's hottest WIM-norm candidate, 21 year old Edit Machlik (2109), kept a positional pressure as white in a Classical Nimzo-Indian duel against our new IM Erlend Mikalsen (2397). Maybe a little bit unexpected; Mikalsen entered a well-known exchange line in which the question used to be whether white's pair of bishop gives winning chances. In this case the answer probably was yes, as Mikalsen played too

fast and became too helpful opening the center for white's bishops.

Machlik on the other hand played too slowly, and after 30 moves the endgame with rook, bishop and five versus rook, knight and five was close to balanced.

One hour ahead on the clock Mikalsen again played too fast just before 40 moves, but as Machlik again played too slow afterwards he could finally play for a win with his f-pawn around move 50. Mikalsen (of course) became too eager, blundered the f-pawn and stumbled into a lost endgame with rook versus rook and a-pawn.

As black's king was cut off along the fifth rank white had a technical win after 70 moves. But (of course) too short of time, she spent 40 of her remaining 50 seconds (!) and then blundered the win away with the natural 72.Rb7? (instead of the instructive 72.Rg8! followed by 73.Rb8!).

About to win the a7-pawns three moves later on Mikalsen refused a draw, but jokingly accepted as Machlik with two seconds left on her clock then demanded the draw.

Abyl Kizatbay (2108) also got a promising start, drawing as black against IM Timofey Galinsky (2378). White did not get much out of this double fianchetto opening after a modest start with 1.g3. Black suddenly got a strong initiative after white played too carelessly and allowed 20.--- Bd3! followed by 21.--- Ne5. Within a few more moves black reached a won position with a strong pair of bishops and an extra pawn on d4.

Playing with passed pawns on a5 and d2 with all the more active pieces, black was totally winning around move 25-34. Instead of resigning Galinsky however fought on bravely, advancing his e-pawn to open up air around the black king. The queen and bishop endgame due to black's open king was not at all easy to win, and after 40 moves white escaped into a drawn opposite-colored bishop endgame.



IM Sebastian Mihajlov

The lower boards also saw several expected and convincing wins for the higher rated team. One of them became Frode Lillevold (2076) versus IM Sebastian Mihajlov (2361).

Still it was for two hours an interesting test of a rare b6-line in a King's Indian Sämisch. White placed his king on f1 and went for a not too dangerous bayonet attack with h4-h5, and the tide gradually turned against white on the kingside. 24.e5? was a mistake overlooking the counterblow 24.--- f6!, trapping white's queen on g5 and winning decisive material.

One of the hottest IM-norm candidates, 15 year old Jens Evang Ingebretsen (2300) had to play somewhat longer but still won without much fear as white against Sigurd Grøver (2020). From an English Fianchetto opening this developed into an isolated Tarrasch pawn position in which white had a pleasant pressure against the d4-pawn.

Instead of just losing a pawn black gave up queen and pawn for two rooks, and from the start of this endgame probably had fair drawing chances. 30.--- R1d2?? however was a terrible blunder in a highly interesting position, as white could exchange his queen for two rooks with 31.Qxd2 and reach a won bishop endgame with an extra queenside pawn.

Another IM-norm candidate, FM Anders Hobber (2295) also landed safely in a won bishop endgame after a turbulent game as black against Sander Fuglestein (2000).

Invited in for the top group due to cancellations a few hours before the round, 14 year old Fuglestein understandably went for a solid and symmetric start with the Slav exchange line. Hobber played actively for a win by an e5-break, and got a slight advantage due to his active pair of bishops.

Fuglestein made many good moves and the position reportedly was unclear around move 26-30, but still the position always was much easier to play for black and his barking bishops. During mutual time pressure black crashed through on the kingside, and as he won two pawns the remaining endgame soon proved winning despite opposite colored bishops.



Sigve Hølleland vs IM Eirik Gullaksen

Underrated Sigve Hølleland (2024) on the other hand made an exciting game after starting up with 1.d4 2.Bf4 3.Nc3 against IM Eirik Gullaksen (2324).

White probably was better for some moves after castling long, but then black probably was better for some moves. And then the players exchanged down to a position with queen, rook, knight and four pawns on each side, in which white had the slightly better position while black was

the better player. Hence the game suddenly settled for a draw by a repetition just before 30 moves.

Today's exotic ladies game was played between WGM Marsel Efroimsky (2287) of Israel and Isha Sharma (1989) of India. Although it lasted nearly 40 moves it was a one way driven game. This smelling French opening line with Nxf6 gxf6 in fact might be playable, but if so black cannot play 9... fxe6? (like she did in this game) - allowing 10.Qh5+ with a strong attack. White castled short with a winning position before 15 moves, and although she could have won much faster later the outcome was never really in doubt.

Our new Finn chess friend Olli Sisättö (2276) on the neighborhood board defeated WFM Anita Grønnestad (1954) as black in another Catalan duel.

After the c- and d-pawns were exchanged, the pawn structure was symmetric and the position probably about equal around move 15-18. Sisättö then sacrificed his e5-pawn to get a pair of bishops and open lines against white's weakened kingside.

A tense struggle followed, and playing with a rook on d5 white reportedly missed a strong 27.Qb3! Be6 28.Ng5! which could have turned the tide. Failing that chance white anyway was in trouble when she at move 29 blundered her key pawn on g3, and black later finished off the game with an elegant queen sacrifice.



FM Mads Vestby-Ellingsen vs Monika Machlik

Today's longest and biggest drama was the game between Tromsø team mates FM Mads Vestby-Ellingsen (2333) and Monika Machlik (2059). White first came slightly better from this English Four Knights line, but as black had active knights and the e-file she did fair enough with pair of knights versus pair of bishops after 23 moves. Then white blundered with 25.Qf2?, overlooking a tactical Nce4!, winning an exchange for a pawn. The following endgame with rook, knight and five pawns versus two bishops and six pawns for sure was winning for black, but still not easy to play.

Machlik ran short of time for 40 moves, but had no serious problem passing the time control with a margin of several seconds. Then she was unwilling to accept a draw, but unable to find any winning plan, hence the players did nothing for some 40 moves. Then one set of pawns were exchanged on the queenside – and then nothing more happened for some 30 moves. With both players running short of time for the final time control the position appeared very drawish after Machlik blundered a pawn, and after 114 moves a drawish position with rook and pawn versus bishop and three pawns was on the board. Then Vestby-Ellingsen very strangely blundered a pawn on h5 and found himself in a dead lost position – which turned out to win the game as Machlik failed to speed up or offer/claim a draw in time, and after more than 130 moves lost on time!

Obviously losing this game was a disappointment for Monika, but Mads did nothing wrong except trying to save a difficult endgame. Both players fortunately handled the situation very sportingly when the smoke had left after the time trouble fire. It can safely be said Mads speeded up just in time, as he in the end had three seconds left on his own clock...

GM-B (ROUND ROBIN)

In short, the first round in the GM B was a very good round for the two top rated GMs **Eduardas Rozentalis** and **Alon Greenfeld** (both winning their game in a convincing way) and a bad day for all the GM norm candidates (as none of them succeeded to win). Additionally it was a rather promising start for the young Norwegian IM norm candidates **FM Andreas Garberg Tryggestad** and **Gunnar Lund**, both producing sounds draws as black against higher rated opponents.

The game between Norwegian IM **Kristian Stuvik Holm** (2467) and Swedish IM **Oskar von Bahr** (2404) was considered a key game for the GM-norm chances in this group, but burned out with a draw within one and a half hour. True enough it was an entertaining firework starting before ten moves as black played 8...Nfg4!? threatening Nxf2 or Qxf2+, to which white coolly replied 9.Qa4!?. Black in turned sacrificed first a rook and then a bishop to give a perpetual check on the white king on b7 (!) after 25 moves. It was however of course all theory, from a line discussed in several games by players at top ten in the world. Holm entered a line he knew was a draw, considering chances good that black was unaware the line. Von Bahr actually was not prepared for it this game and spent much more time on the clock, but he had seen the variation not that long ago and proved able to reconstruct it on the board.



GM Alon Greenfeld vs GM Felix Levin

Many people expected a short GM draw when **Alon Greenfeld** (2514) and **Felix Levin** (2476) had to meet in the first round. Greenfeld however was white with the higher rating. Beside he was much less tired as he arrived early Saturday, while Levin played directly after a long travel from an important Bundesliga team game.

Greenfeld in short played for the full point in an unbalanced Queen's

Gambit Declined line, in which white after exchanging off the queens at f6 inherits the better pawn structure, which black hopes to compensate with his pair of bishops.

White came better after exchanging one of the black bishops, and increased the advantage by opening queenside files for his rook. Still materially balanced, the position was not easy to win after 30 moves, but white had all the possibilities. Following an instructive c-file intervention on the c6 outpost, he went on to reach a materially balanced double rook endgame in which the combination of white's more active rooks and better pawn structure brought an easy win.

Belarus IM Sergei Kazakovskiy (2440) and Norwegian FM Andreas Garberg Tryggestad (2305) spent some more minutes and some less moves, but also played an English opening and also finished with a draw before 30 moves. The game was a sensible positional struggle in which black had no problems after the queens were exchanged on d7 at move 15, and black if anyone was slightly better when a draw was agreed seven moves later on.

American FM Alexander Betaneli (2235) arrived two days before round one to be fit for fight as white against GM Eduardas Rozentalis (2568). Still it did not work out too well as the Lithuanian legend equalized in the opening and got a space advantage after realizing e4 in this English fianchetto opening.

White succeeded exchanging three sets of minor pieces, but still the e4-pawn combined with a h5-h4 bayonet attack gave black a disturbing attack.

As black had played hxg3 and was about to start a direct h-file attack, white anyway was in quicksand when he at move 37 gave up his queen and the key pawn at f2 for black's two rooks. The rest was sound technical transportation from a GM point of view, as white still had an airy king and several weak pawns.



Gunnar Lund vs IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen

IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen (2385) versus Gunnar Lund (2271) was some kind of reunion game between two former teammates from Tromsø, both now very talented young stars at age 16.

The opening was a rare Pirc line in which white first had a slight space advantage after black exchanged his e5-pawn at d4. White however made a mistake when allowing black to exchange his white-squared

bishop for a knight on f5, as white's pair of bishops later counted less than black's center pawns (much due to black's center pawns closing the diagonals).

Due to his better pawn structure, black still was better with knight and seven versus bishop and seven in a rather closed endgame. Lund as the lower rated player with black still looked more satisfied when a draw was agreed after 32 moves.

OPEN GROUP (SWISS)

Taking into account that the ELO difference was above 350 points in all of the 36 games, first round of the open qualifies as both entertaining and surprising. More or less sensational for such a tournament, the top two rated players both failed to win.

Top rated Henrik Løbersli (2102) first was clearly better, but then slightly worse, and then the endgame was just a solid draw as white against highly talented and underrated 12 year old Sverre Lye (1645).



Kazim Yilmaz vs Jo Løberg

endgame with king and g-pawn versus king and rook.

Second-rated Jo Løberg (2045) got a tight game as black against Kazim Yilmaz (1641), and although winning a pawn he proved unable to win the theoretically drawn rook endgame with four kingside pawns versus three kingside pawns.

Unpredictable Yilmaz defended well today, and in the end assured the draw by sacrificing his rook to reach a drawn

All photos by Anniken Vestby