



TRADEWISE GIBRALTAR CHESS FESTIVAL

Monday 22 January - Thursday 1 February 2018

Round 9 Report: *Wednesday 31 January 2018 - by John Saunders (@JohnChess)*

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Just one of the leading pairings ended decisively in the ninth and penultimate round of the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters on Wednesday 31 January, so the traffic jam at the top has grown to five players on 7 out of 9 – top three seeds Aronian, Vachier-Lagrave and Nakamura, plus Rapport and Dubov, with no fewer than 14 more stacked up on the next score group. Four women players now have 6 points: Nino Batsiashvili, Ju Wenjun, Valentina Gunina and Pia Cramling.

Hikaru Nakamura is still amongst the five leaders despite a third successive draw, this time to Richard Rapport of Hungary. It had its moments of interest and imbalance but still ended peaceably on move 33. Nakamura's reward (if that is the right word) is a last round pairing of Black against Levon Aronian, who already has 4½/5 with White so far in this competition and has the huge boost of a sixth white, so only the American's very best form will keep his hopes of a fourth consecutive success alive.

Dubov and MVL managed three fewer moves on top board. The game followed an ancient encounter between Flotys and Pirc from 1950 for a while, so not exactly latest theory. The even pawn structure suggested not too much was to be expected by way of imbalance and so it proved. In the tenth round MVL, like Aronian, receives a sixth White and plays Richard Rapport, while Dubov will be Black against the upfloated Le Quang Liem who took advantage of an unfortunate blunder by the Russian prodigy Andrey Esipenko in the ninth round, the youngster's consolation being a GM norm for just turning up.

Levon Aronian took his chance to join the quartet of overnight leaders by beating SP Sethuraman. The Armenian star deviated from a line he played against Ding Liren in the final of the World Cup in Tbilisi last year on move 10.

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L.Aronian (2797) - SP Sethuraman (2646)

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.Bg2 Nf6 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.Qa4+ Bd7 6.Qxc4 c5 7.Ne5 Qc8 8.Qd3 Nc6 9.Nxd7 Nxd7 10.Nc3 10.Qb3 Be7 11.Nc3 0-0 12.0-0 was played in the FIDE World Cup final match between Aronian and Ding Liren in Tbilisi last year, and ended in a draw. **10...Be7 11.Qb5 a6 12.Qa4 Nd4 13.0-0 0-0 14.d3 Nb6 15.Qd1 Rd8 16.Bd2 Qd7 17.Rc1 Rac8 18.b3 h6 19.Kh1 Nd5 20.Nxd5 exd5 21.e3 Nc6 22.Qh5 Qd6 23.f4 a5 24.a4 Rb8 25.e4 dxe4 26.Bxe4 b6 27.g4 (diagram)**



Aronian's last few moves indicate that he is prepared to live with a slightly awkward-looking pawn structure in order to have the services of two active bishops and mount a challenge to the black kingside. **27...Nd4 28.Bc3 f5!?** Not **28...Nxb3 29.Be5 Qe6 30.Rce1** when Black is probably just lost. Black is now worried by an imminent kingside attack so he pre-emptively with a pawn sacrifice. **29.gxf5 Bf6 30.Rg1 Re8?** **30...Kh8** retains the h-pawn but maybe then **31.Rg6 Qf8 32.Rcg1** leads to nagging pressure for White, without Black having scope for much active counterplay. The text move, however, gives up a pawn,

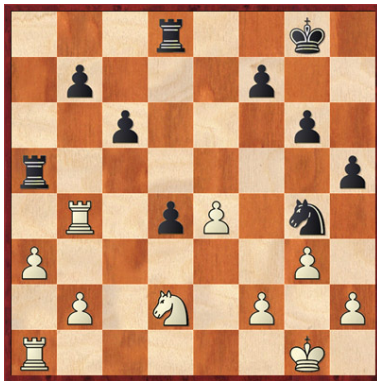
seemingly for nothing. **31.Qxh6 Rbd8 32.Rce1 Re7 33.Re3 1-0** There is no time for 33...Nxf5 34.Bxf5 Rxe3 35.Rxg7+ and mates; 33...Kf8 34.Qh8+ Kf7 35.Qh5+ Kf8 36.Reg3 is hopeless.

Jules Moussard has had a good tournament but he played altogether too passively against Mickey Adams and was soon lured into a typical Adams spider's web. "It was equal, basically, but I managed to trick him near the end with a knight and a passed pawn," was Adams' own summary of the game.

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J.Moussard (2571) - M.Adams

1.g3 d5 2.Bg2 e5 3.c3 Nf6 4.d4 Nbd7 5.Nf3 Not an opening to set the pulse racing. "His opening was a bit unambitious – he played like he was Black with White... it was a reversed Modern or something," commented Mickey Adams after the game. **5...Bd6 6.dxe5 Nxe5 7.Nxe5 Bxe5 8.Bf4** The plan seems to be simply to exchange more pieces but Black gains a bit more time after this. **8...Bxf4 9.Qa4+ c6 10.Qxf4 0-0 11.Nd2 Re8 12.e3** A forced weakening of the d3 square, which doesn't matter now but does later. **12...Qb6 13.Qb4 13.Nb3 a5 14.Qd4** looks a better way of dealing with the Qxb2 threat. **13...Qxb4 14.cxb4 d4 15.e4** White deals with the threat but only at the expense of creating a passed pawn for his opponent. **15...a5 16.bxa5 Rxa5** Black already has a slight edge, which is all the encouragement a player of Adams's quality needs. **17.0-0 Be6 18.a3 g6 19.Rfc1 Rd8 20.Bf1 h5** Mickey Adams never does anything in a hurry and his show on the kingside may be part of a waiting game to see what further positional concessions his opponent may be willing to give. **21.Bc4 Bxc4 22.Rxc4 22.Nxc4 Rb5 23.e5 Ng4 24.a4 Rb4** survives in the short term but you can't help feeling White will struggle in the longer term. **22...Ng4 23.Rb4 (diagram)**



White has long since ceded the initiative to Black but in actual fact his position is not too bad. Here Black decides to force the issue slightly, to see what White is made of. **23...Rc5!?** **24.h3?!** Here White has a couple of better moves. He might be able to play 24.Rxb7 but then Black can occupy the seventh rank with 24...Rc2 and go on testing his opponent. However, for example, after 25.Rd1 c5 26.a4 c4 27.Nf3 d3 28.Nd2 it's not clear that Black has a good way to proceed. Adams mentioned in passing the possibility of 24.Rc4 when again it is not clear if Black really has a tangible plus. **24...Ne5 25.f4** 25.Rxb7 is definitely problematic now since after 25...Rc2 the knight has to move from d2 and it has to be to f1 as 26.Rd1?? allows 26...Rxd2 and a fork on f3. **25...Nd3 26.Nb3** This is bad but 26.Rc4 Rxc4 27.Nxc4 b5 28.Ne5 Nxe5 29.fxe5 c5 also looks very

difficult to defend. 26.Rb3 Nc1 27.Rxb7 Rc2 28.Kf1 Nd3 29.Rd1 Nxb2 30.Rb1 Nd3 still looks good for Black. **26...Rc2 27.Rxd4 Rxd4 28.Nxd4 Rxb2 29.Rd1?** A blunder but after a move such as 29.Nf3 Black starts to mobilise his passed pawn with 29...c5 and it is hard to stop it without conceding other weaknesses. **29...Nf2 0-1** Resignation looks a tad premature but White is going to be a pawn down and facing a multitude of threats from the rook and knight combination and in return he has zero counterplay. Now 30.Rc1 Nxh3+ 31.Kf1 h4! and Black breaks up the kingside pawns.

Mikhail Antipov has had a fine tournament and he won this entertaining game in which Black had the potential advantage of a dark-squared bishop for his opponent's knight but put it on the wrong square and suffered the embarrassment of seeing White swarming into all the dark squares that the bishop should have been controlling. Harry the h-pawn played an important role in winning this game so everyone's favourite commentator would have been in dreamland.

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M.Antipov (2588) - V.Mikhalevski (2538)

1.b3 g6 2.Bb2 Nf6 3.Bxf6 exf6 4.c4 d5 5.cxd5 Qxd5 6.Nc3 Qd7 7.e3 f5 8.d4 Ba3 It's understandable that Black should want to use his 'extra' dark-squared bishop actively but later in the game he is made to regret not having this piece on g7. **9.Qd2 0-0 10.h4** Once again, Simon Williams's favourite move makes an early entrance. Our much-loved commentator casts a very long shadow in this tournament. **10...f4 11.h5** "Having played h4, you must play h5." (Williams) Actually, I've no idea if Simon has ever said that. I just made it up, but he could have said it. **11...fxe3 12.fxe3 Qg4** If Black had won this game, I'd be banging on about how weak White was on the dark squares, how he shouldn't have given up his dark-squared bishop, etc, etc. But,

remarkably, it is to be White who ultimately triumphs via the dark squares as the a3 bishop remains hopelessly out of the game. **13.Bc4 Be6 14.Nf3 (diagram)**



14...Nc6? There is a saying "it's later than you think" and I think it applies here. Black really has to get on with it and, despite the text looking like a normal developing move, it's not the right moment to be playing it. Black needs to play something like 14...Bxc4! 15.bxc4 Bb4 16.hxg6 Qg3+ 17.Kd1 fxc6 when the position looks roughly level. One of the vital points about Black capturing on c4 immediately is to be able to recapture on g6 with the f7 pawn and facilitate a viable defence of the kingside position.

15.hxg6 hxg6? Surprisingly, after this mistaken recapture, the game is as good as over for Black. Instead 15...fxg6!? 16.Bxe6+! Qxe6 17.d5 Qe8 18.dxc6 Rd8 might be a viable sacrificial line but otherwise Black is in serious trouble. **16.e4!** Harry the h-pawn has gone back into the box

(R.I.P.) but he's done his job admirably. The threat is simply Qh6 and mate, and Black hasn't got much he can do to stop it without having to make serious concessions of position or material. **16...Qg3+ 17.Kf1 Bxc4+ 18.bxc4 g5** Black is a dead duck whatever he does. 18...f6 19.Qh6 Kf7 20.Qh7+ Ke8 21.Rh3 Qg4 22.Nd5 is overwhelming. **19.Ne2 Qg4 20.d5 f5** 20...Ne7 21.Qc3 threatens mate and the embarrassingly impotent bishop on a3. **21.Rh3 Bd6** This attempt at counterplay falls short. **22.dxc6 fxe4 23.Qd5+ Rf7 24.Qd4 Kf8 25.cxb7 Rb8 26.c5 1-0**

The battle for the women's prize hotted up as overnight leader Nino Batsiashvili drew and was caught by Ju Wenjun, Valentina Gunina and Pia Cramling, who won their games against Lou Yiping, Nigel Short and Luca Moroni respectively. Nigel Short went in for a dodgy line of Alekhine's Defence which involves Black sacrificing a piece or the exchange but it worked out badly and ended with a blunder.

A number of norms were achieved including GM norms for Nino Batsiashvili (her final norm), Andrey Esipenko and Lance Henderson, and a notable IM norm for Delhi player Prithu Gupta who only took up chess four years ago. I'll attempt to summarise norms achieved in the final round report.

A selection of photos from round nine can be downloaded from the Flickr collections of [John Saunders](#) or [Sophie Triay](#).

Video footage and interviews from today's round are available to view and/or embed from the Tradewise Gibraltar [YouTube Channel](#).

Report Ends

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