



Tradewise Gibraltar Chess Festival 2017

Monday 23 January - Thursday 2 February 2017

Round 8 Report: *Tuesday 31 January 2017 - by John Saunders (@JohnChess)*

Happy Birthday to Ju

After an unpromising start, with most of the leading games ending in draws, round eight of the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters sprang to life towards the end of the first session and delivered some pulsating games of chess. By the end of the round, a fifth player had been added to the group of players on the top score when Veselin Topalov defeated Emil Sutovsky. In the next score group there were wins for a resurgent Fabiano Caruana against GN Gopal, plus Laurent Fressinet, David Howell and SP Sethuraman, while for the second day running the star game of the day was played by one of the women competitors when Ju Wenjun produced a tremendous finish to defeat the only woman player above her on the rating list, Hou Yifan.



Ju Wenjun celebrated her 26th birthday in style

So, with two rounds to play, the five leaders are David Anton Guijarro (Spain), Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (France), Hikaru Nakamura (USA), Yu Yangyi (China) and Veselin Topalov (Bulgaria) on $6\frac{1}{2}/8$, with 14 players, including two women players, Ju Wenjun (China) and Antoaneta Stefanova (Bulgaria), on 6.



Anton Guijarro pressed Vachier-Lagrave but couldn't break his resistance

The two games between the four leaders produced well-fought draws. David Anton Guijarro of Spain gave further evidence of his developing prowess by pressing hard against Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and coming out of the early middlegame a pawn up. But it wasn't quite enough to win as the French star found a way to snuff out the life from his position. The other game between the leaders was more of a steady draw, with Hikaru Nakamura unable to make headway against the cagey play of Yu Yangyi.

The round eight pairings produced three notable clashes between players from the same country. In two cases this led to a fairly swift truce, particularly in the case of Ivan Cheparinov and Antoaneta Stefanova of Bulgaria. Antoaneta, like her Battle of the Sexes rival captain Nigel Short, loves playing in Gibraltar and excels when playing here, so she deserved to take it a bit easy after a fine win against Eduardo Iturrizaga in the previous round. She is currently on a TPR of 2709. England's two finest players of the modern era, Nigel Short and Mickey Adams also settled for a repetition on move 23.



Short plays Adams: "nothing to see 'ere, now, ladies and gents, move along now..."

JU WENJUN CELEBRATES HER BIRTHDAY IN STYLE

The third clash between players of the same country produced real fireworks. In round seven Hou Yifan played what will quite likely turn out to be the best game of the tournament but in round eight she was on the wrong side of a best game contender herself. The women's world champion and number one meeting the women's world number two was a special occasion in itself and the play lived up to the billing. Hou Yifan played with her usual flair and courage but perhaps pushed her luck a little too far in spurning an opportunity to close out for a draw.



The all-China, all-women clash between Hou Yifan and Ju Wenjun was the star game of the day

The game suddenly became tactical and Hou Yifan left the door open to a remarkable tactic. The watching audience, used to super-GMs missing mind-bending lines suggested by computer engines, half-expected Ju Wenjun to overlook the chance but she worked it all out to a nicety and the game ended with a crisp mating attack. Thus she defeated the world champion and world number one, and reached a 2600+ rating for the first time, all on her 26th birthday. Not a bad way to celebrate, only marginally spoiled by having to endure us press hacks singing her an excruciating rendition of 'happy birthday to you' in the interview room after the game. For her part Hou Yifan will ruefully reflect that it was she who took down the then women's world number one Judit Polgar in Gibraltar a few years. She is now a full point off the speed for the top women's prize. The opposition on the Rock is pretty tough, and the male number one has also suffered a reverse during the tournament. The higher they are, the harder they fall.

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Hou Yifan (2651) - Ju Wenjun (2583)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.f4 c5 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.Be3 Be7 8.Qd2 0-0 9.dxc5 Nxc5 10.0-0-0 a6 11.Qf2 b6 12.Nd4 Qc7 13.g3 13.Kb1 Bb7 14.Nxc6 Bxc6 was the continuation in So-Nakamura, US Championship 2016, which ended in a draw. Hou Yifan prefers something more aggressive. **13...Bb7 14.Bg2 Na5 15.f5 Qxe5 16.Bf4 Qf6 17.h4 e5 18.Nxd5!**? An alternative was 18.Bg5 Qd6 19.Bxe7 Qxe7 but this might only be a change of move order since 20.Nxd5 looks like the best try anyway. **18...Bxd5 19.Bg5 Qd6 20.Bxe7 Qxe7 21.Bxd5 exd4 22.Bxa8 Rxa8** Black is now nominally ahead on material, with two knights for a rook but actually the smoke hasn't quite cleared yet. **23.Rhe1 Qc7 24.b4** 24.Rxd4 is playable, but not 24.Qxd4?? since that would cost White her queen after either Nb3+. **24...Nc6 25.bxc5 bxc5** Now it is clear that White is up by an exchange for a pawn but that Black has a slight positional compensation, making the overall assessment close to equal. **26.Qf4 Qb6 27.Qd6 h5 28.Re5** 28.Qd7 looks like a way to play for a draw, with Re8+, a capture on f7 and a possible perpetual check, but perhaps White is still playing for more. **28...c4 29.Rde1 c3** With nasty threats at both ends of the board, play gets decidedly sharp. **30.Re8+ Rxe8 31.Rxe8+ Kh7**



32.Qd5? The outcome of the game centres on this choice of move by Hou Yifan. Instead 32.f6 leads to a draw. White threatens tricks such as Rh9+! followed by Qf8+ and mate on g7, but Black can proceed with 32...Qb2+ 33.Kd1 Qb1+ 34.Ke2 Qxc2+ and take perpetual. After the text move, suddenly analysis engines were flagging up a winning line for Black. But it wasn't easy to calculate in the seven minutes remaining to Black. Would she play the winning line? Five minutes ticked by... **32...d3!!** ... and she played it. (I supposed it helped that it threatened a fairly obvious mate in two but the subsequent play also had to be weighed up.) **33.Qxd3 Nb4!** 33...Qg1+?? 34.Qd1 would lose, of course. Having played A,, Black must play B and she does.



34.Qe4 Qg1+ 35.Qe1 Qg2! 36.Qe4 The refutation of 36.Qe2 is perhaps the hardest to see: 36...Qh1+ 37.Qe1 (Not 37.Qd1 Nxa2+, etc) 37...Qb7!! and White has a curious shortage of viable defences. **36...Qd2+ 0-1** It is mate next move.



Veselin Topalov got a fit of the giggles in the post-game interview

Emil Sutovsky's early 9.Bxh6 looked a bit fishy against Veselin Topalov who said [in the press interview after the game](#) that the Israeli grandmaster "prematurely attacked me" before dissolving into a fit of the giggles as he hadn't quite recovered from a comical conversation with a well-known grandmaster a few moments before in the press room in which the word "premature" had occurred in quite another context. A few moves later 'Harry the h-pawn' as commentator Simon Williams likes to call it, was left to be taken and Sutovsky's increasingly desperate attempts to conjure up counterplay were effectively countered by Topalov.

Gopal-Caruana was an interesting game, with the world number two playing a lesser known fianchetto line against the Ruy Lopez / Spanish opening and then giving up a pawn for lasting pressure against his opponent's undeveloped position. Gopal gave back the pawn in order to exchange most of the pieces and escape the pressure but found himself in a difficult rook and pawn endgame which couldn't be saved.



Huzman-Howell: White's tactic after the time control misfired and Black pounced

David Howell joined his two English colleagues Adams and Short on the second score group with a win against Alexander Huzman of Israel. Howell got into his usual time trouble, with only about a minute for his final seven moves, but it was his opponent, with a relatively cushy eight minutes left, who went astray, allowing Black to push his kingside pawns and open up a line of attack along the h-file. In fact, the real damage was done when Huzman tried a tactic just after the time control which misfired horribly and landed him in a mating net.

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A.Huzman (2557) - D.Howell (2655)



A very unusual position. Black has two extra pawns but they should drop off, or at least be neutralised, if White finds the right continuation. But instead he tried to be clever. **41.Nf6??** 41.Rbf1 Rd8 42.Nf4 and White is still in the game. 41.Rxh4?? would be as bad as the game move since 41...Rg8+ 42.Kxf3 Rxh4 wins a major slice of material. **41...Rg7+ 42.Kxh4 Ne7** 42...Rh8+?? 43.Nh5 would be fine for White, but Huzman must have missed Howell's devastating intermezzo, preparing the rook check on h8. **43.Nh5** Of course if White moves the knight to e4 it will be mate in one. And if 43.Ng4 Nf5+ 44.Kh3 Rh8+ and mate next move. 43.Ne8 is an

imaginative try but then 43...Nf5+ 44.Kh3 Rg3+ 45.Kh2 Rxe8 and White is soon mated. **43...Nf5+ 44.Kh3 Rg5 45.Rhd1** 45.Nf4 Rg3+ 46.Kh2 Rg4 47.Be5 Rxf4! wins. **45...Rbg8 46.Rd7+ Ke6 47.Rh7 Rxb5+ 0-1** 48.Rxb5 Rg1 and Black will soon have a new queen.

Austrian IM Valentin Dragnev's time in the limelight was brought to an end when he allowed Indian GM and 2016 Asian champion SP Sethuraman to play a strong tactic in the opening, ruining his position. The 23-year-old GM from Chennai thus joins the chasing group on six points.

Another strong GM from India further down the lists is having a torrid time. You may recall that the 2008 world junior champion Abhijeet Gupta was one of the surprises losses of the first round. He then recovered to win his next four games but has since gone on a disastrous run of three straight losses, to Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – that one is forgivable – and then IM Jonathan Carlstedt and untitled Spanish player Lance Henderson de la Fuente to find himself back on 50%. The Tradewise Gibraltar Masters is a great tournament but it can also be an unforgiving place if you are a bit off your game. The latter game was good news for the young Spaniard as it makes him virtually certain of his first IM norm.

Tradewise Gibraltar Masters, Leader board after 8 rounds: 1st equal, Vachier-Lagrave (France), Nakamura (USA), Yu Yangyi (China), Anton Guijarro (Spain), Topalov (Bulgaria) 6½/8; 6th equal, Adams (England), Short (England), Ju Wenjun (China), Howell (England), Cheparinov (Bulgaria), Caruana (USA), Matlakov (Russia), Antoaneta Stefanova (Bulgaria), Akobian (USA), Fridman (Germany), Gelfand (Israel), Fressinet (France), Sethuraman (India), Edouard (France) 6. *Women's leading scores:* Ju Wenjun (China), Antoaneta Stefanova (Bulgaria) 6/8, Anna Muzychuk 5½.

Photos of round 8 by John Saunders: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskNbAr74>

Photos of round 8 by Sophie Triay: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskRj4Pph>

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

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