

Dear Dragons,

Welcome to Edition 1 of the Weekly St George Club Champs newsletter! This year sees a return to our traditional divisional round robin format, after the pandemic caused 1 year of a cancelled Club Champs and 2 years of running the event as a Swiss. An excellent turnout of 60 players sees us with 6 divisions with exactly 10 players each, with a majority of players rated below 1500 ACF ensuring mostly highly competitive divisions. We welcome many new players, some who have never played competitive chess over the board before, as well as some players who are returning after “layoffs” of various lengths. For example, the top division sees Daniel Melamed playing his first ever Club Champs; top seed John Stuart Plant returning after a three year absence; and Mario Falchoni playing his first Club Champs since 2006! It all makes for a great deal of fun...

In Division 2, Andrew Li and Pieter Stoltz are playing their first Club Champs in this format, while the same is true of Stuart Taylor and new member Netra Bhatt in Division 3. Division 4 sees James McGrouther, Euan Marquez Zarauz, James Bullen and Huey Teng as “Club Champs newbies”. In Division 5, Ziam Mokhtar is new, while Aaron Hu makes a return after a six year absence and Faaiz Malik, Ashton Li and Ali Murtazaev all play their first round robin Club Champs. The same is true of Ethan Currie, Mary Hunt and Samuel Slingo in Division 6; while Lisa Brandenburg and Ethan Riegman are completely new and playing their first event at our club. We wish all of them, and indeed all players, a highly enjoyable and competitive event!

To explain to the newcomers, each week I’ll write a newsletter describing that week’s happenings, varying in length from 2-3 pages (on catch-up weeks) to 4-6 pages (most weeks). What I give is a brief description (at least one sentence long) of *every* game, so nobody feels left out; most weeks I will also include at least 3 games, and at least 2 positions from other games. To do so I photograph scoresheets and positions from some games, and make my own notes on others; but I need your help... If you think you’ve played a good game, send it to me please; it saves me time, and I’d love to receive it. To spice things up a bit more, I’ll even add a few anagrams of some players’ names at the end; I know not everyone likes this, but I do! So without further ado, let’s see how things went in Week 1; already lots of fun games, only four draws and hence a thrilling first edition!

Division 6

Lisa Brandenburg 0-1 Ethan Riegman: Our two debutants played an intriguing first round game, Ethan essaying the Albin Counter Gambit with a confidence belying his tender years and inexperience in over the board chess! Lisa kept her extra pawn and had an early advantage – until she sacrificed a piece for a pawn for no real reason that I could see. Then Ethan was winning, but Lisa fought back, winning two of Ethan’s pieces by move 18. She was well on top, so Ethan went for an all-out attack... And it succeeded, as Lisa’s defence was not accurate enough; Ethan won back all his material and more, finishing up by checkmating the white king on f4!

Reno Sciberras 0.5-0.5 Samuel Slingo: Samuel’s first result at the club in a long time control game was an amazingly tough battle! Reno was winning very handily after he won first a piece with a discovered attack, then the exchange via a knight fork. But a rook ahead, he relaxed rather too much – and let Samuel’s pieces in! Samuel won his material back, queened a pawn and wound up the exchange ahead. But the resultant position was too tricky for him to win, as Reno kept fighting; so the final result was an honourable draw!

William Liu 1-0 Stephen Manwarring: This game was even until move 20, although William did miss one chance to win a piece with an in-between move (a capture). Then William won a pawn; but he blundered it back five moves later, and the position was back to being level! When William sacrificed a rook on move 30, Stephen was winning if he took it. But he was scared of a check, so he declined, only to find himself losing his queen to a discovered attack three moves later! All in all, a pretty good game by both players; see game on the next page.

Liu, William (553) - Manwarring, Steve (965), 2023 St George CC Div 6 Round 1, 07/03/2023
1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.Nf3 0-0 5.Bg5 d6 6.e3 a6 7.Be2 Bg4 8.0-0 Nbd7 9.b4 c6 10.a4 Qc7
11.Qd2 Rfe8 12.h3 Bxf3 13.Bxf3 Nb6 14.Qd3 Rad8 15.Rac1 d5 16.cxd5 Nbx5 17.Bxf6 Nxc3
18.Rxc3 Bxf6 19.b5 Ra8 20.bxc6 b6 21.e4 Rad8 22.Rc4 e6 23.Rd1 Rd6 24.e5 Bxe5 25.d5 exd5
26.Bxd5 Red8 27.Qf3 Kg7 28.Rh4 Rh8 29.Rb4 a5 30.Rxb6 Bf6 31.Rb7 Qc8 32.Rxf7+ Kg8
33.Rc7+ 1-0

Ethan Currie 1-0 Mark Boan: Poor Mark was never really in this one, despite fighting on for 62 moves! Letting his bishop get trapped and losing it for a pawn inside the first 10 moves, he faced an uphill battle thereafter. He actually did an excellent job of drumming up counterplay, at one point missing a chance to equalise on move 32; but in the end it was too much, and he had to concede.

John Matson 0.5-0.5 Mary Hunt: A tough game! After both players had the edge at different stages of the first 20 moves, Mary drummed up a powerful kingside attack, John really suffering at the hands of the Black f3 pawn. Attacking hard with queen, rooks and knight, Mary missed a chance to push her g-pawn, then let John get the advantage by trading queens! This got worse for her when she sacrificed a piece for some powerful connected passed pawns near the enemy king. John was winning, but the pawns were too scary; so he offered a draw, which Mary duly accepted.

Division 5

Faaiz Malik 1-0 Ashton Li: An easy win for Faaiz! His King's Gambit worked a treat, with an advantage by move 6, then winning a piece by move 12. Ashton fought on, but to no avail; he went pawn grabbing with his queen, and found himself checkmated on move 18.

Kevin Liu 1-0 Aaron Hu: Aaron's comeback game against a rapidly improving Kevin was a very topsy-turvy struggle! Kevin had an edge by move 6, with the two bishops and more active pieces; but he gave back the two bishops and let Aaron equalise by move 15. Kevin missed a chance to win a piece on move 18, not wanting to run with his king; then he lost a pawn to a discovery, followed by dropping a piece a few moves later and suddenly he was losing! But Aaron had to be very careful, and he was not... He let Kevin trade off all the pieces to the point where Aaron's one remaining knight could not stop Kevin's h-pawn from queening. A great battle; see game below.

Liu, Kevin (1185) - Hu, Aaron (967), 2023 St George CC Div 5 Round 1, 07/03/2023
1.d4 d5 2.c4 Nf6 3.cxd5 Qxd5 4.Nc3 Qa5 5.Nf3 e6 6.Bd2 Bb4 7.a3 Bxc3 8.Bxc3 Qd5 9.e3 b6
10.Qa4+ Bd7 11.Qc2 Bb5 12.e4 Qh5 13.Bxb5+ Qxb5 14.e5 Nd5 15.a4 Qc4 16.Nd2 Nb4 17.Qb1
Nd3+ 18.Kf1 Qa6 19.b4 Nxb4+ 20.Kg1 Nd5 21.Ne4 f5 22.exf6 gxf6 23.Qb2 Qd3 24.Re1 f5
25.Ng5 Qxc3 26.Rxe6+ Kd7 27.Qxc3 Nxc3 28.g3 Re8 29.Rh6 Re1+ 30.Kg2 Rxh1 31.Kxh1 Nc6
32.Rxh7+ Kc8 33.h4 Nxd4 34.h5 Ne4 35.Rh8+ Kb7 36.Rxa8 Kxa8 37.Nxe4 fxe4 38.h6 c5 39.h7
c4 40.h8Q+ Kb7 41.Qxd4 1-0

Ali Murtazaev 1-0 Peter Swinton: A tough pill for Peter to swallow! After refuting young Ali's early attempt to attack, Peter equalised, then soundly sacrificed a piece for a pawn to maintain the balance. But then instead of castling queenside or pushing f5, he moved his queen instead! In his own words: "he managed to break the pin as a result of me putting the queen on a poor square". From there, it was all over: the extra piece prevailed for Ali in 32 moves.

Geoff Hyde 1-0 Ken Eldridge: An unlucky loss for Ken! Solid throughout, he weakened Geoff's pawns, eventually winning 3 of them. But in a won queen ending, he touched his queen, missing that it was check; the touch move rule meant he had to lose his queen, so he resigned on the spot.

Dimitrios Stathos 1-0 Ziam Mokhtar: A convincing win first-up for Dimitrios. He won a gambit pawn, then a second pawn; Ziam got one pawn back, but his king got into trouble! By move 25, it should have been mated; Dimitrios won lots of material and checkmated it anyway 6 moves later.

Division 4

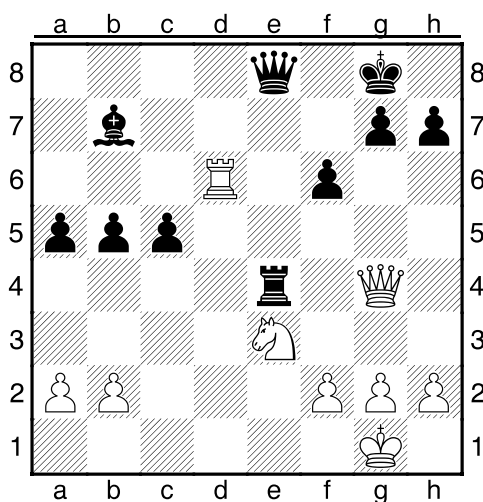
James McGrouther 0.5-0.5 James Bullen: The first ever competition game at the club for these two; and what a game it was! Black equalised early, then had a small advantage with a powerful e4 pawn by move 15. They eventually traded into a queen and bishop ending; Black won a pawn, but then lost his bishop to a queen fork! So now White was winning, but perpetual check possibilities abounded; and throughout all of this, White was moving too fast. The result was that he could not convert; in the end he blundered back his bishop, and the players agreed to a draw.

Mario Parissis 0-1 Elijah Udovitch: Playing c4 as Black in a French, Elijah found himself initially slightly worse; but he equalised by move 16, then simply won material! First a skewer netted him the exchange, then a rook fork snared him a pawn. As the cherry on top, he had two connected passed pawns; this enabled him to trade down to a dead won king and pawn endgame.

Huey Teng 1-0 Sait Buzgan: Huey is a promising junior; and what a start he had here! Better right out of the opening, he got the two bishops and doubled Sait's pawns. Sait fought back to relative equality, but then lost a pawn. From there Huey simply pursued the enemy king! He won the exchange, then a piece; a rook ahead, he prevailed easily from there.

Brian Connell 0-1 Euan Marquez Zarauz: After a fairly even opening, Euan won a pawn on c4, and a second pawn on e4. Then Brian dropped the exchange. Instead of taking mate in six, Euan traded queens, then won a piece; a whole rook up with queens off, he still went on to win easily.

Chris Brown 0-1 Anthony Lopes: A good game by Anthony! After equalising early on as Black, he let Chris get a small edge against the backward Black c-pawn; but he defended solidly, waiting for Chris to err. This he duly did in the position below.



Having just lost his e4 pawn, White is still even after the correct 33.Qd1. Instead he played 33.Qg3, then panicked after the Black reply 33...f5! Worried about 34...f4, he moved 34.Nf1 (he was still in the game after 34.Qg5); he resigned after the crushing skewer 34...Rg4 winning g2 by force.

Division 3

John Nichas – Netra Bhatt: This game was postponed by John, leaving poor Netra having to wait a week for his Club Champs debut!

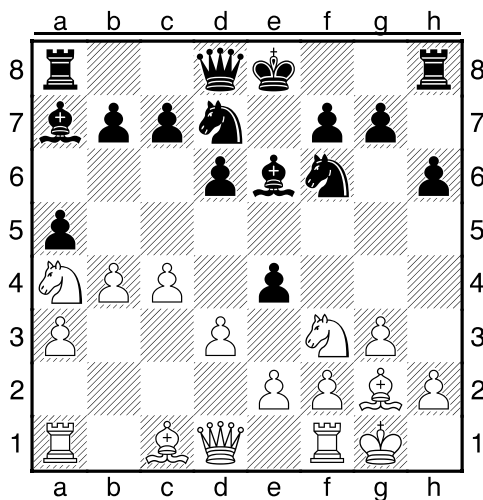
Darren Curtis 0-1 Sam Sharkawy: Sam played well here, first equalising with his King's Gambit Declined despite his doubled isolated e-pawns. At one point he was lucky Darren missed a winning pawn fork; but Sam then won a pawn with a knight forking tactic. This he consolidated beautifully, winning the exchange via another knight fork; there was no escaping for Darren after that.

John Parissis 1-0 Ghassan Beydoun: Not much happened for the first 10 moves here, until John got a strong knight on e5. When Ghassan tried to defend g7 with Nh5, John was winning with Qg4; he missed it initially, but got a second chance! This he took, splattering his opponent with a Bxg6+ sacrifice; he won 2 pawns, then exploited the exposed Black king to force mate (see game below).

Parissis, John (1451) - Beydoun, Ghassan (1548), 2023 St George CC Div 3 Round 1, 07/03/2023
 1.d4 e6 2.e3 d5 3.Bd3 c5 4.c3 a6 5.f4 Nc6 6.Nf3 h6 7.0-0 Qb6 8.Nbd2 c4 9.Bc2 Bd6 10.Ne5 Nf6 11.Qf3 Bd7 12.a3 a5 13.Rb1 a4 14.Qg3 Nh5 15.Qf3 Nf6 16.Kh1 Na5 17.Qd1 Nb3 18.Qf3 Bc6 19.Qg3 Nh5 20.Qg4 Bxe5 21.fxe5 Nxc1 22.Rfxc1 g6 23.Bxg6 fxe6 24.Qxg6+ Ke7 25.Qxh5 Rag8 26.Rf1 Be8 27.Qh4+ Kd7 28.e4 Bg6 29.Rf6 Qc6 30.exd5 Qxd5 31.Rbf1 Bf5 32.Rf7+ Ke8 33.Qe7# 1-0

Colin Goldsmith 0-1 Stuart Taylor: A battle royale! After a quiet opening, Colin missed a chance to win a piece after an unsound tactic by Stuart. He won a pawn instead, but Black had some compensation in the form of the two bishops. Then Stuart won the exchange via a pin. This time it was Colin's turn to have some compensation, but his centralised knights were not quite enough; and he resigned on move 38 after he lost a knight when his pinned pawn could not recapture.

Ludwig Wolf 0-1 Louis Jeff: We begin our tale here from the position below after 10 moves each.



This is level after 11.dxe4; but Ludwig played 11.Nd2, and Black is better after 11...e3. But Louis is sharper than that! He tried 11...Bxf2+, a very creative piece sacrifice. White is a bit better after 12.Kxf2 e3+; while 12.Rxf2 e3 13.Rf1 exd2 14.Bxd2 gives White a somewhat bigger edge. Instead Ludwig played 12.Kh1, and Louis was better! Ludwig equalised, but then gave Louis the two bishops; the Black pieces penetrated his position, first winning a pawn then a piece and the game.

Division 2

Srijan Badam – John Karabatsos: This game was postponed by both players.

Brian Allison 1-0 Andrew Li: A pretty convincing win by Brian. After an equal opening, White got the edge when Black gave up the centre on move 10. From there Black got passive, and White won a couple of pawns. Black then had to tie his pieces in knots blockading a passed e7 pawn. It took a while, but Brian was always winning from there, the e-pawn eventually queening by force.

Albert Tjahja 0-1 Celina Wu: By her own confession, Celina was rather lucky to win this one! After an even opening, she got a small space advantage and was doing well for the first 24 moves. But then she walked into a pawn fork and lost a piece for a pawn! Five moves later Albert gave her significant counterplay – and relative equality – on his weak c3 pawn. Two moves after that, he blundered the piece back, leaving Celina in a winning ending which she won easily.

Malachi O'Donoghue 0-1 Michael Babic: An excellent game by Babic! He equalised early in a Sicilian, then the players settled into an even manoeuvring game for the first 15 moves. Soon after Michael got the edge with an f5 pawn push. Then he broke through in the centre with e5 followed by e4 and e3, and Mal was struggling against this protected passed pawn! More pawn pushes followed, and Mal had to give up a piece for a pawn. He resigned three moves later, as he had to give up a rook to stop the e-pawn from queening. See game below.

O'Donoghue, Mal (1766) - Babic, Michael (1732), 2023 St George CC Div 2 Round 1, 07/03/2023
1.e4 c5 2.f4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 e6 5.Nf3 Nf6 6.Bb5+ Bd7 7.Bxd7+ Nbx7 8.d3 Be7 9.0-0 0-0
10.Kh1 Nd5 11.c4 Nb4 12.a3 Nc6 13.b3 Qc7 14.Bb2 Rad8 15.Nfg5 h6 16.Qh5 Nd4 17.Bxd4 cxd4
18.Nf3 f5 19.Ned2 Qxf4 20.Rae1 Qd6 21.b4 e5 22.c5 Qd5 23.Nc4 e4 24.Nfd2 e3 25.Nf3 Kh7 26.Nh4
Bxh4 27.Qxh4 g5 28.Qh3 f4 29.Qf3 Qxf3 30.gxf3 Nf6 31.Nd6 Rd7 32.b5 g4 33.Re2 gxf3 34.Rxf3
Ng4 35.Ne4 Ne5 36.c6 bxc6 37.bxc6 Rc7 38.Rh3 f3 39.Ng5+ Kg6 40.Nxf3 Nxf3 41.Rg2+ Kh7
42.Rhg3 Rff7 43.Rg6 e2 0-1

Peter Bogdanoski 1-0 Pieter Stoltz: This one was even throughout, a few trades leading to an equal rook ending. A couple of times a player was a pawn up; but active rooks were always able to win it back! Both players got rooks to the seventh rank and connected passed pawns. At this stage the game looked like a draw. But somehow White handled his pawns better; so it was Peter who ended up prevailing, a lengthy battle being one of the last games of the night to finish.

Division 1

Richard Eccles 0-1 John Stuart Plant (JSP): This game *was* the last to finish; and what a battle it was! See game below. I am indebted to John Stuart Plant for his description of this epic struggle!

Eccles, Richard (1797) - Plant, John Stuart (2147), 2023 St George CC Div 1 Round 1, 7/3/2023
1.e4 Nc6 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 e5 4.Bb5 Bd7 5.0-0 Nf6 6.Re1 Be7 7.Nc3 exd4 8.Nxd4 Nxd4 9.Bxd7+
Nxd7 10.Qxd4 Bf6 11.Qe3 0-0 12.Nd5 Re8 13.Bd2 Nc5 14.f3 Bxb2 15.Rab1 Bf6 16.Qf4 Be5
17.Qg4 c6 18.Ne3 Bd4 19.Kh1 Bxe3 20.Rxe3 b5 21.Bc3 Ne6 22.f4 g6 23.Rh3 Nf8 24.f5 Qe7
25.Re1 f6 26.Rf3 g5 27.h4 h6 28.hxg5 hxg5 29.Rh3 Qg7 30.Ree3 d5 31.exd5 Rxe3 32.Rxe3 cxd5
33.Qf3 Rd8 34.Bd4 Qf7 35.Kg1 Rc8 36.Qe2 Qd7 37.g4 Qc6 38.Rc3 Re8 39.Qf3 Qd6 40.Kg2 Re4
41.Bf2 Qb4 42.Kh3 Qe7 43.Rd3 Qf7 44.Qd1 Qh7+ 45.Kg2 Qb7 46.Kh3 Re7 47.Rxd5 Rh7+ 48.Kg3
Qc7+ 49.Kg2 Rh2+ 50.Kg1 Qf4 51.Bc5 Rh3 52.Rd3 Qh2+ 53.Kf1 Qf4+ 54.Bf2 Rh1+ 0-1

Over to JSP now: “The engine has me as better (-1) before move 25. It helped when I won a pawn as Black from a solid structure. But for the pawn, Richard had a little bit of pressure on my king; slightly hard to defend, but it should have been OK. But then on move 25 Richard missed his first chance to break through, with the hard to spot rook sacrifice Rxh7 (a computer move!) followed by fxg6 giving him +3! It seemed like hours elapsed – they probably did – between moves 25 and 35, Richard having this big bind and me just hanging on with a hugely passive knight + extra pawn.

Richard missed another chance at move 31, with the hard to spot e5 – instead of exd5 (I was just happy for some trades! That is, to release at least some pressure and just a small bit of his bind). But 31.e5 instead from him probably meant my kingside was slowly but surely crumbling. Another hard to spot computer move. But after all that, the computer still gave it as about equal for the next ten moves or so, with me (finally remembering I can also move my pieces!) ahead after 40...Re4. It started to swing back a tiny bit then; but not by much, as Richard was still as tenacious as ever.

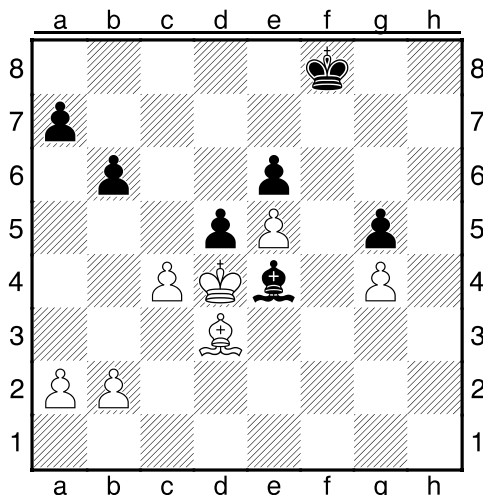
My final tactic threatening to take advantage of a pin of his rook if he had played 49.Rd6 was not really a tactic at all! After my idea 49...Rd7, he has 50. Qd5+ and 51. Bc5, and it's still equal. But as midnight encroached and passed, it was understandable neither of us saw this. When Richard moved 49. Kg2 instead and my long dormant pieces finally got in, that was enough to finally edge out the marathon. A great and fun welcome back for me to the Club Champs after 3 long years...”

Mario Falchoni 0.5-0.5 Jose Escribano: A lucky escape for Mario! First Jose equalised easily in a Sicilian; then he got the edge, with the two bishops and a superior centre. Things got serious for Mario when he sacrificed a piece for 2 pawns, lashing out for activity and some sort of counterplay. At that point, Jose offered a draw! He was worried about the higher rated Mario's attack on the open f-file, but it was an illusion; Jose was winning, so Mario accepted the draw with alacrity.

Stevo Acevski 0-1 Graham Saint: Playing blitz, Stevo allowed Black's French to equalise easily, then blundered a piece to a Noah's Ark style trap on the kingside! He fought on, trying to drum up counterplay; but his pieces were gradually driven back. Then he blundered a pawn to a discovery, and the end was nigh; he resigned when losing his queen to another discovered attack.

Arthur Huynh 1-0 Robert Kovacs: Clearly trying to be aggressive against his higher rated opponent, Robert sacrificed two pawns right out of the opening! But sadly for him, it was totally unsound... Arthur gradually drove his pieces back, then started to attack himself; Robert resigned soon after he had to sacrifice a piece to prevent mate.

Daniel Melamed 1-0 Jim Mavroidis: A frustrating loss for Jim! Equal for much of the game, he was able to swap off all the way into a bishop ending. The critical moment came when they reached the position below, with Jim having to answer the question: to trade or not to trade?



Would you swap bishops? Jim said yes, and then lived to regret it; the position was still fairly even after 43...Bf3, for example. Instead play proceeded 43...Bxd3? 44.Kxd3 dxc4+ 45.Kxc4 a6 46.a4 Ke7 47.a5!, and White is winning easily. The point is he can force his king in, and/or gain the opposition due to having spare pawn moves with his b-pawn. And that's what happened; the finish was 47...Kd7 48.axb6 Kc6 49.b7! Kxb7 50.Kc5, and Black resigned rather than play out 50...Kc7 51.b4, and the Black king must give way and White wins.

Now to finish, half a dozen anagrams: one from each division! Can you solve them? To help you out a bit, they are all Club Champs debutants. And they are "demean mild ale"; "real wind"; "that bar net"; "blue lens jam"; "a virtual maze"; and "slalom genius". Let me know how you fare in working out who these players are!