

Dear Dragons,

Welcome to Edition 2 of the Weekly St George Club Champs newsletter! One of the things I have already noticed is the paucity of draws in this event: across all divisions, there were only four draws in Round 1, and just three draws in Round 2. There are various possible reasons for this, ranging from fatigue to issues with technique; but I like to think it is because everyone is playing aggressive fighting chess! It all makes for a truly fun event... Speaking of fun, here are the solutions to last week's anagrams – how many of these did YOU get? Here “demean mild ale” = Daniel Melamed; “real wind” = Andrew Li; “that bar net” = Netra Bhatt; “blue lens jam” = James Bullen; “a virtual maze” = Ali Murtazaev; and “slalom genius” = Samuel Slingo. And if you think that those were interesting, have a look at the Round 2 games; without further ado, let's see how everybody went!

Division 4

Euan Marquez Zarauz 0-1 Chris Brown: The first 20 moves were relatively even here, with Euan gaining a tiny space advantage. Then he got a passed a pawn on a6. One move later, he was too aggressive with his queen and lost a pawn! He was still OK until he walked into a discovered attack losing the exchange. After this, Chris' technique was good; he traded queens and won in 58 moves.

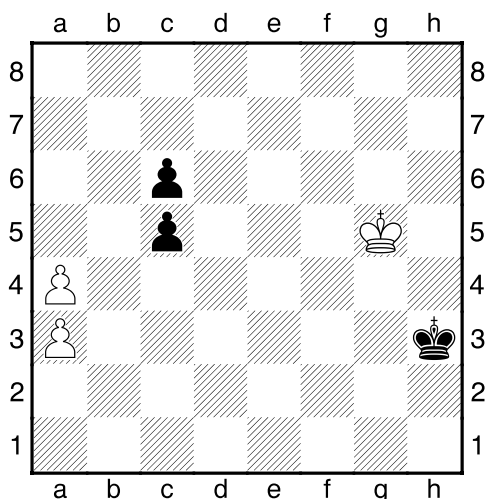
James Bullen – Anthony Lopes: This game was postponed by Anthony, who was away.

Sait Buzgan 1-0 Brian Connell: A tragedy for Brian! He was on top for much of this game, eventually winning a pawn and trading into a position with queen and two rooks each. With both kings exposed (castled on opposite sides), it really looked like Brian's attack was going to get there first; he was winning easily with 30...Re8. But after 30...b5 instead, Sait was not only able to hang on, but also start a strong counterattack! Two moves later, he had a forced mate; see game below.

Buzgan, Sait (1419) - Connell, Brian (1373), 2023 St George CC Div 4 Round 2, 14/03/2023

1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3 d5 4.Qxd4 Nf6 5.e5 Nc6 6.Qf4 Nh5 7.Qe3 Qc7 8.f4 g6 9.Nf3 Ng7 10.Na3 Nf5 11.Qf2 a6 12.Nc2 Bg7 13.Bd3 f6 14.exf6 Bxf6 15.g4 Nd6 16.g5 Bg7 17.Ncd4 Nxd4 18.Nxd4 0-0 19.Qe3 Nf5 20.Nxf5 Bxf5 21.Bxf5 Rxf5 22.Bd2 e5 23.h4 Qc6 24.0-0-0 d4 25.Qg3 exf4 26.Qh3 dxc3 27.Bxc3 Bxc3 28.bxc3 Rc8 29.Rd3 Qa4 30.Kb2 b5 31.h5 b4 32.hxg6 Qa3+ 33.Kb1 Rxc3 34.Qe6+ Kg7 35.Rxh7+ 1-0

James McGrouther 0-1 Mario Parissis: A 65 move marathon that may have taught James a harsh lesson: king and pawn endings are hard! The first few moves of a French saw James with a small plus, but Mario fought back... He won 2 pawns, then gave them back for a winning attack. But he did not play accurately enough, letting James trade into a drawish ending. James blundered a pawn to a rook fork, yet still hung on; and eventually they reached the king and pawn endgame below.



One move can make such a difference... Here Black draws with 45...Kg3 46.Kf5 Kf3 47.Ke6 c4, and both players queen. Mario got the move order wrong and played 45...c4, which should have lost to 46.Kf4. But James played 46.a5 instead, which loses... James probably missed the fact that the Black c-pawn queens with check; put it all down to experience, I hope both players learn from this!

Elijah Udovitch – Huey Teng: This game was postponed by Elijah.

Division 5

Ken Eldridge 0-1 Dimitrios Stathos: A solid game by Dimitrios! After easily equalising, he slowly got his pieces more active and gained the upper hand. Then he won a weak e-pawn, followed by a second pawn; it took until move 56, but he had no trouble winning the game from there.

Ashton Li – Zain Mokhtar: This game was postponed by Ashton. And I owe Zain an apology... I have been calling him Ziam; I now know Zain is the correct first name, because he told me!

Peter Swinton 0.5-0.5 Geoff Hyde: One of only 3 draws this round saw both players being highly risk-averse! Geoff equalised early in a Caro-Kann, and they stayed even from there. Soon they began a series of trades; and they agreed a draw on move 28 with bishop against knight and 6 pawns each.

Aaron Hu 1-0 Ali Murtazaev: Another long game; but only because Ali fought till the bitter end! Aaron won a pawn as early as move 6; but Ali did a good job of fighting on, winning the pawn back and reaching equality by move 20. Both players had doubled isolated pawns, meaning care was needed; and Ali was not careful enough! Two more pawns fell, and he found himself in a lost rook ending. From there Aaron did show due care, pocketing the full point in 64 moves.

Faaiz Malik 1-0 Kevin Liu: A good illustration of the dangers of playing too quickly in a sharp position! Faaiz essayed the King's Gambit; but Kevin declined, and the position was fairly even until he erred on move 9. Then he had a problem with f7, and had to sacrifice a pawn to save it. Now it was Faaiz's turn to move too fast, giving Kevin a great counterchance with 14...Nexf5. But Kevin spurned this; worse again, he hung on until move 18. Then he moved his king to e8 instead of c6 on move 18. Two moves later, he was losing his queen and being mated; see game below.

Malik, Faaiz (1217) - Liu, Kevin (1185), 2023 St George CC Div 5 Round 2, 14/03/2023

1.e4 e5 2.f4 Nc6 3.Nf3 d6 4.Nc3 Bg4 5.Bb5 Nge7 6.h3 Bd7 7.a3 a6 8.Bc4 b5 9.Ba2 g6 10.Ng5 Be6 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Bxe6 Nd4 13.Ba2 Bh6 14.f5 gxf5 15.Qh5+ Kd7 16.Qxh6 Nxc2+ 17.Kd1 Nxa1 18.Qe6+ Ke8 19.Nd5 Qd7 20.Nf6+ 1-0

Division 6

Ethan Riegman 1-0 Mary Hunt: To her credit, it was Mary who made all the early running in this one! Equal by move 10, she won a piece and a pawn by move 15 and was winning easily. In fact it looked like she was mating on g2; Ethan had to get passive with Qf1 to stop mate. But then Mary blundered the piece back! Two pawns up, Mary was still winning – till she lost her bishop on g2... From there she missed drawing chances, at one stage having three pawns for the piece she was down. But she gradually lost all her pawns; and she resigned after she moved her rook en prise.

Mark Boan 1-0 John Matson: This 90 move marathon was very sweet for Mark: in his own words, he does not beat John very often! John missed just one chance, when he could have won a free pawn on move 13; after failing to play this, they were even for much of the game. But then Mark won a couple of pawns, winding up in a dead winning rook and pawn ending. Knowing his record against John, he was ultra careful, taking forever to convert his advantage. Then he gave John one last stalemate trick which would have drawn the game! But fortunately for Mark, John missed this; so Mark got there in the end, forcing mate on the back rank aided by his pawn on h7.

Stephen Manwarring 0-1 Ethan Currie: Another marathon in this division! Play was about level for much of the game, with Stephen if anything having a small edge due to a slight space advantage. But a few trades and a locked position evened this out... Eventually Stephen briefly got on top, winning a pawn in a double rook ending. But not only did Ethan win it back, he also won a second pawn as Stephen tired; and in the end, it was Ethan who prevailed after Stephen blundered away his e-pawn and gave his opponent two decisive connected passed pawns.

Samuel Slingo 0-1 William Liu: Taking his time, Samuel played well here, staying equal and even getting a slight edge in the initial skirmishes. It was a shame, then, when he blundered his queen to a knight fork... William is too good a player to let it slip from there; it was all over soon after.

Lisa Brandenburg 1-0 Reno Sciberras: Four of the five games in this division lasted more than 55 moves this round; and this one was no exception... Reno won a pawn early, but failed to castle; and he paid when Lisa was able to open the d-file against his uncastled king! She won a piece, won her pawn back and seemed well on the way to victory. Then she blundered her piece back to a pin! Fortunately for her, she was still two pawns up in a rook and pawn endgame; it took a while, but eventually she queened her h-pawn and went on to win in 57 moves.

Division 2

Andrew Li 0.5-0.5 John Karabatsos: John and Andrew are both solid; so it is not surprising to me that they played the second of only 3 draws on the night. Having said that, the game was not really drawish, as Andrew won a pawn early to a discovered attack and was winning easily! The advantage got huge, Andrew still well on top even after missing the winning 28.Ne4. But John kept fighting; and it paid off when Andrew gave up the exchange amid complications! From there queens came off; and John, the exchange for a pawn up, was the only one with winning chances. But after fighting so hard, he was tired; so he offered a draw, which Andrew gleefully accepted. See game below.

Li, Andrew (1609) - Karabatsos, John (1554), 2023 St George CC Div 2 Round 2, 14/03/2023

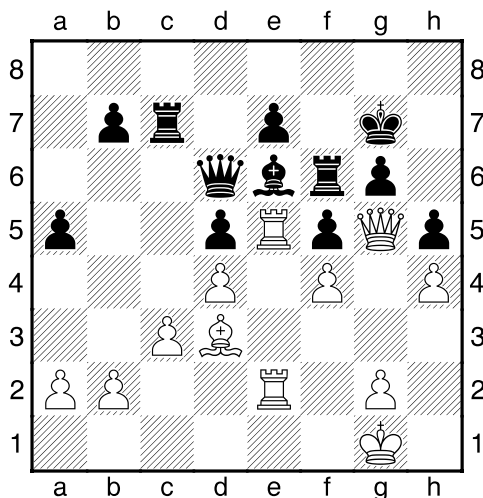
1.d4 e6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 d6 4.Nc3 Nf6 5.e4 Be7 6.Nf3 0-0 7.Bd3 e5 8.h3 Na6 9.0-0 Nc7 10.b3 Bd7 11.Bb2 Nh5 12.Nxe5 Nf4 13.Nxd7 Qxd7 14.Bc2 Rfe8 15.Ne2 Ng6 16.Ng3 Qd8 17.Nf5 Bf6 18.Bxf6 Qxf6 19.Qd2 Ne7 20.Ng3 g6 21.Rae1 Qg7 22.f4 Qh6 23.Qc3 Nc8 24.e5 Qg7 25.Rf3 f6 26.Rfe3 Qh6 27.Rf3 a6 28.b4 b6 29.e6 Re7 30.Rb1 cxb4 31.Rxb4 b5 32.Bd3 Nb6 33.Qd4 Rb8 34.cxb5 Nbx5 35.b6 Nxb4 36.bxc7 Rxc7 37.Qxd6 Qg7 38.Bc4 Qe7 39.Qxe7 Rxe7 40.Rb3 a5 41.a3 Na6 42.Rxb8+ Nxb8 43.Ne2 ½-½

Michael Babic 1-0 Albert Tjahja: Albert got an opening advantage here when White had to move his king; but Michael equalised quickly. The centre was locked, so his king was safe; and he soon got an edge when he penetrated on the open c-file. His queen got in, winning Black's b7-pawn to get an advanced passed a-pawn. But he gave Albert counterplay with queen and knight against his king; he had to sacrifice the exchange, and Albert may have had a perpetual check. Instead, fearing the passed a-pawn, his queen retreated; so Michael was winning again! Before too long queens were traded, resulting in a won endgame for White; and Michael went on to prevail in 77 moves.

Pieter Stoltz 0-1 Mal O'Donoghue: In Mal's own words, not a very sound game! After eschewing an early 9...g5 (equalising), he was worse and passive for much of the rest of the game. But clearly Pieter was content with a draw, trading into an even bishop ending. This should have been drawn, but the king and pawn ending he then entered voluntarily was not! His doubled pawns meant he was effectively a pawn down; Mal got an outside passed pawn, converting it to a win in 43 moves.

Brian Allison 1-0 Peter Bogdanoski: One of the shorter, easier wins of the night! Mind you, Peter was level until his overaggressive Ng4 on move 13. From there he was forced to lose a key pawn on d5. Instead he chose to give up a piece! Brian was winning easily after that; he won the d5 pawn anyway, and Peter resigned when he also unguarded and lost a whole rook.

Celina Wu 1-0 Srijan Badam: Black's Caro-Kann equalised early here; but then Celina gradually got a positional edge. This grew bigger after Srijan's weakening f5, giving Celina a potent e5 rook and queen on g5. But she still needed to break through! This she duly did in the position below.



Here it seems 26.g4 is the only way to make progress; so Celina played it! (My engine says White should keep building with Re3, Rg3, a4 and Bb5; but why not go for it?). Srijan played 26...fxg4 (perhaps 26...hxg4 is slightly better) and went down after 27.f5 Bf7 28.fxg6 Bxg6 29.Bxg6 Rxg6 30.Qxh5 e6 31.Rg2 Kf6 32.Qh8+ Rcg7 33.h5, winning a rook. A fun attack for Celina!

Division 3

Netra Bhatt 0-1 Louis Jeff: A patient, well-played game by Louis! After a quiet and even opening, he got a better centre and gradually built up superior activity for his pieces. Netra briefly equalised again; but then Louis won first one pawn, then another! Netra's attempt to counterattack by pushing his kingside pawns was in vain. They reached a queen endgame where Louis' extra pawns were decisive; by the time Netra resigned, he was four connected passed pawns down!

Stuart Taylor 1-0 Ludwig Wolf: With the two bishops, Stuart had the better of it by move 19 of a Sicilian here: Ludwig's d-pawn was backward, and his pieces were passive. Four moves later, Stuart had lost all these advantages by trading too much, and Ludwig was better! Soon after they reached dead equality, and a draw looked likely. But then an errant knight move cost Ludwig the game! He lost two pawns into a lost rook ending; and he resigned on move 53 when a rook trade was forced.

Ghassan Beydoun 0-1 Colin Goldsmith: Colin asked me if his exchange sacrifice on move 12 was good, and the answer is simple: a resounding yes! White erred on move 11, his queen move leaving his king very lonely indeed... The exchange sacrifice was the right way to take advantage of this, the Black queen and knight hounding the White monarch. Colin's follow-up was not ideal – he should have played exd4 on move 16 – enabling Ghassan to return to relative equality. But 21.Qxc3 was a fatal error, leaving White a rook down with no compensation. The killer blow was the neat way Colin forced a queen trade on move 28. The result was never in doubt after that; see game below.

Beydoun, Ghassan (1548) - Goldsmith, Col (1513), 2023 St George CC Div 3 Round 2, 14/3/23
 1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nf6 3.Nf3 Nc6 4.0-0 Bc5 5.Re1 0-0 6.c3 d6 7.h3 Be6 8.Bxe6 fxe6 9.b4 Bb6 10.Bb2 Qe8 11.Qb3 Nh5 12.d4 Rxf3 13.gxf3 Qg6+ 14.Kh2 Nf4 15.Rg1 Qh6 16.Rg3 Nd3 17.Na3 Nxb2 18.Qxb2 exd4 19.Rag1 dxc3 20.Rxg7+ Kh8 21.Qxc3 Bd4 22.Rxh7+ Kxh7 23.Qc2 Be5+ 24.Rg3 Bxg3+ 25.fxg3 Rg8 26.b5 Ne5 27.Qxc7+ Rg7 28.Qc3 Qd2+ 29.Qxd2 Nxf3+ 30.Kg2 Nxd2 31.e5 d5 32.Nc2 Nc4 33.Nd4 Nxe5 34.Nxe6 Re7 35.Nd4 Kg6 36.g4 a6 37.Nf5 Rc7 38.bxa6 bxa6 39.a4 Rc2+ 40.Kg3 Rc3+ 41.Kg2 Kf6 42.Nh6 d4 43.h4 d3 44.Kf2 Rc2+ 45.Ke1 Nf3+ 46.Kd1 Ra2 47.g5+ Nxg5 48.hxg5+ Kxg5 49.Nf7+ Kf4 50.a5 Ke3 51.Kc1 d2+ 52.Kb1 Rxa5 53.Kc2 Ra1 0-1

Sam Sharkawy 0-1 John Parissis: Another game that dragged on for quite a while; but the result was inevitable by move 30! An equal opening was followed by John gaining the edge, with the two bishops and doubled White c-pawns. He lost both these advantages – but won two pawns! Then Sam blundered the exchange. It took forever after that; but John won the ending nearly 30 moves later.

John Nichas 0.5-0.5 Darren Curtis: Our last draw of the evening had a quiet beginning; but then it was John with the early advantage, as the Black pawn centre looked vulnerable! A few trades later, though, and they were dead level... They played on for twenty more moves, with the lead oscillating but never big; and in the end they drew a simplified bishop against knight endgame.

Division 1

John Stuart Plant 1-0 Mario Falchoni: Once again, I am indebted to JSP for his description of this game: “I was overall quite happy with the way I played: just an extra safe, solid positional game. I think he probably missed a chance to install a strong knight on e5 early on in the game. But after that, the position is always just equal. I knew that I had to be careful; while he had a wrecked pawn structure (saddled with a doubled pawn), he had a lot more space. I was extremely pleased to find strong proactive defensive moves to counter his seeming fixation with taking my h2 pawn...

In all fairness, he had a scary looking attack on the h2 pawn; but Qe1 thwarted it temporarily. The idea was if he played his rook round, then I had the powerful riposte 24.f4! forcing a swap of queens. This would have benefited me, as the only one with any play on the queenside; I would inevitably break in sooner rather than later. I was actually joking with myself in the game! Normally I don't care a lot about the queenside – especially if the king is on the kingside – but still, it was useful...

The next critical moment of proactive defence came when Mario tried to swap his queen and rook around, having the rook in front instead to go for h2. I rationalised that if the worst came to the worst and he got h2, I'd move Kf1 and Ke2 and be able to flee the scene. But my 27 c5! was a discovered attack setting up a threat on his crucial e4 pawn. And somehow he missed this, playing 27.Rh5 anyway. Once e4 falls, g4 is immediately under pressure; and he has no time to take my h2 pawn, as I will get g4 with check and everything is falling. And this soon happened! It was a good game, a story of my proactive defence on the queenside drifting over to the kingside to ensure the win...”

Graham Saint 0-1 Richard Eccles: Arguably the most exciting game of the night, Richard being dragged into Graham's somewhat wild and crazy style! Richard had an early edge, as a strange move order got the players to a French where White had played f3. Soon he took on b2 with his queen, and things went a bit crazy... Black gave up a piece; but he had four pawns for it, and the White king was on f3! At this stage, I thought Richard was winning easily; but he missed a winning Bc6+ a couple of times, and Graham was able to fight his way back into the game...

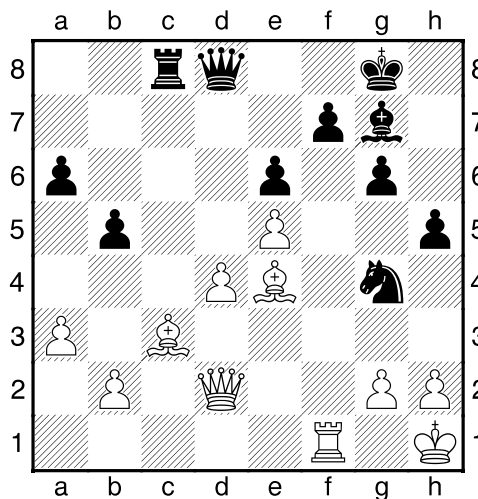
When Richard castled, Graham was back to level; then he was winning when he got in 24.g5! His king was surviving somehow, and he was actually able to start thinking of attacking himself. But then an exchange sacrifice by White brought things back to some sort of weird dynamic equilibrium, which persisted for a few moves. Then just when I thought that the result would be a most unlikely draw, Graham moved his king to the wrong square (h3) on move 41! This proved fatal, leading to a very nice mate for Richard; see game below.

Saint, Graham (1767) - Eccles, Richard (1797), 2023 St George CC Div 1 Round 2, 14/03/2023
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3 e6 4.e5 c5 5.c3 Nc6 6.Be3 Nge7 7.a3 cxd4 8.cxd4 Nf5 9.Bf2 Qb6 10.Ne2 Bd7 11.Nbc3 Qxb2 12.g4 Nfxd4 13.Bxd4 Nxd4 14.Rb1 Nxf3+ 15.Kf2 Qxa3 16.Kxf3 d4 17.Rb3 Qa5 18.Qxd4 Bc5 19.Qf4 0-0 20.Bg2 f6 21.Kg3 fxe5 22.Qc4 Qc7 23.Kh3 Rf6 24.g5 Rf5 25.Rxb7 Qd8 26.Ne4 Be3 27.Rxd7 Qxd7 28.N2g3 Kh8 29.Nc5 Bxc5 30.Qxc5 Rc8 31.Qe3 Qe7 32.Nxf5 exf5 33.Ra1 f4 34.Qd3 Qxg5 35.Bf3 Rd8 36.Qc2 h5 37.Rxa7 Qf6 38.Qe2 Qf5+ 39.Kg2 Rc8 40.Be4 Qg5+ 41.Kh3 Rc3+ 42.Bf3 Qg4# 0-1

Jim Mavroidis 1-0 Robert Kovacs: Despite winning, Jim was not really happy with this game; in his own words, he made a couple of bad mistakes! Play was relatively level for the first 20 or so moves; but then Robert gained the advantage when he won Jim’s b2 and a2 pawns. After that, Jim had no choice but to try and complicate to play for counterplay. He won one pawn back, but was still worse until Robert took his d5 pawn with his queen. This walked straight into a removing the guard tactic, with Jim eventually winning a rook and knight and forcing mate – a rather lucky win!

Daniel Melamed 1-0 Stevo Acevski: Once again, Stevo found out that playing blitz is not always a good idea – especially not against an opponent as strong as Daniel! First he gave up a pawn; then for three moves he missed a Nxf2 tactic that would have given him equality. After that he was gone, as he had to lose more pawns. Instead he chose to give up a whole piece! This meant the end was nigh; Stevo resigned on move 22 when still a piece down and losing several more pawns.

Jose Escribano 0-1 Arthur Huynh: Play was fairly even for the first 20 moves here; but then Arthur began to expand on the kingside! Jose countered in the centre; but Arthur maintained a small advantage. After a couple of trades, the crucial point came when they reached the position below.



Here Arthur played 26...Nxf2!, a move he had been considering for a while! The simple point is it wins a pawn due to the upcoming queen fork Qxh4+. Jose fought on a pawn down, but soon found himself forced to trade queens. Rooks came off a few moves later. The resultant bishop ending was winning, and Arthur’s technique is good: giving Jose no counterplay, he prevailed in 61 moves.

And now to finish, my second fun thing: nicknames! See if you can figure out who the following players are (one from each division). The clue is initials, but this is not a universal theme; it’s really only half true ... Who are “The Cowboy Hat Tree”; “The University Degree”; “Washington”; “The Politician”; “Dr Jekyll”; and “Smear Cartilage”? To find out, tune in to next week’s exciting edition!