

When Middlesex travelled to Hassocks for their first match on October 10th they did so with a team with an average grade of 190 and IM Colin Crouch on board 2. Their defeat to Sussex in that match led to the call up of several other strong players thus creating the formidable team that turned up to play us at Wanstead House. An average grade of 200, a new Russian star player on board 1 and Colin Crouch now on board 7 meant that we were left with a mountain to climb, and so it proved.

Our own team, average grade 190, was as strong as I could have hoped for and there were many fine performances. Tim Hebbes, having outplayed Colin Crouch deserves special mention, narrowly missing the winning line towards the end of the session. Failing to win a single game was of course disappointing but in the circumstance the Essex players did well, the eleven draws being a testament to that. The incremental time control was new to many of the players but seemed to be appreciated and worked well. Spectators watching the last game to finish between Richard Bates and David Sands, in itself an intriguing struggle, were clearly engrossed as the 10 seconds added after each move kept the tension alive.

This Middlesex team will surely do well and perhaps take the English Open title at present held by Yorkshire. Anthony Fulton, the Middlesex Match Captain, is certainly fortunate to have so many strong players to choose from.

Remaining Open Fixtures 2009-2010

- Saturday January 9th v Surrey (Home) *
- Saturday February 6th v Sussex (Away)
- Saturday March 6th v Herts (Home) *
- * Wanstead House - Matches now start at 1.30 p.m.

Jonathan Rogers v Alexei Slavin

This is quite a remarkable game in which the Russian player opens with 1... Nf6 followed by five consecutive pawn moves ! Many, including myself, might well think that this is one too many, but what do we know. It's unclear whether it was these early moves or the subsequent 7 ... Bb7 but Jonathan soon established a very comfortable position and indeed by move 17 looked as though victory remained a distinct possibility. Jonathan quite rightly turned down a clear drawing opportunity on move 28 and why not - even 10 moves later a clear advantage still remained. In this context, and we've all been there before, it was particularly galling for Jonathan that things then went badly wrong. Hurrying to win the isolated pawn on h7 he underestimated Black's position and then unfortunately failed to find the last saving resource. A most unfortunate end to a finely played game.

The second game is the one solitary win that we secured in the Herts v Essex match just over a year ago - one that we lost 9½-6½ despite outgrading our opponents. In this particular game Jonathan secured a significant advantage and finished the game off in fine style - no mistakes this time.

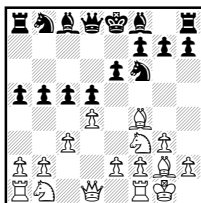
White : Jonathan Rogers

Black : Alexei Slavin

Essex v Middlesex 7/11/09 Board 1

Notes by Jonathan Rogers

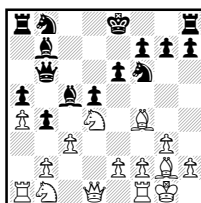
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|---|-----|-----|
| 1 | d4 | Nf6 |
| 2 | Nf3 | e6 |
| 3 | g3 | b5 |
| 4 | Bg2 | d5 |
| 5 | O-O | c5 |
| 6 | c3 | a5 |
| 7 | Bf4 | |



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| 7 | ... | Bb7 |
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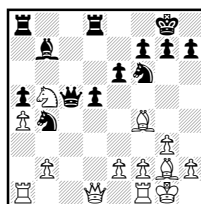
My opponent thought that this was an error allowing White an enduring initiative, preferring 7 ... Nbd7, leaving the option of ... Ba6.

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| 8 | dx5! | Bxc5 |
| 9 | Nd4 | Qb6 |
| 10 | a4 | b4 |



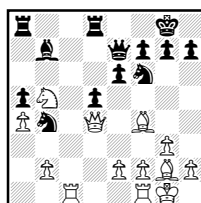
Preferring unfavourable complications to an unfavourable position without counterplay after 10 ... Bxd4 11 Qxd4 Qxd4 12 cxd4 Ba6 Rc1. Nor could he play 10 ... bxa4 because I play 11 Bxb8 before 12 Qxa4+.

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| 11 | Nb5 | Na6 |
| 12 | Nd2 | O-O |
| 13 | Nb3! | Rfd8 |
| 14 | Nxc5 | Qxc5 |
| 15 | cx4 | Nxb4 |



Forced, since 15 ... Qxb4 is met by 16 Bd2. I thought my opponent was lucky not to be losing at once in this position. So did he, as it turned out afterwards.

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| 16 | Rc1 | Qe7 |
| 17 | Qd4 | |



Not bad, but perhaps I should have preferred 17 Rc7 Rd7 18 Bd6 Qd8 19 Rxd7 followed by a

capture on b4 then securing an outside passed a-pawn with b2-b3. But I still thought it early to release the pressure.

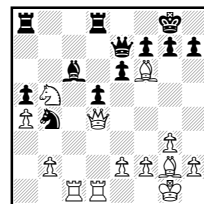
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| 17 | ... | Bc6 |
| 18 | Rfd1 | |

White prepares to play Bf1 and e3 before hurrying to finish the game with Qb6 or Qc5 or doubling the rooks on the c-file.

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| 18 | ... | Qb7 |
| 19 | Bg5! | |

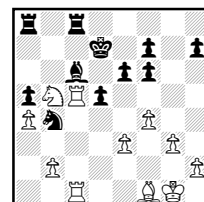
This was always a potential problem for him, but again he gets away with the oversight.

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| 19 | ... | Qe7 |
| 20 | Bxf6 | |



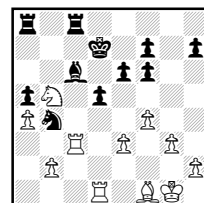
Neither of us were sure about this, but I had thought that Black might defend after 20 Qc5 Qxc5 21 Rxc5 Nd7; and giving Black an isolated h-pawn would give me extra opportunities to win an endgame should it get that far. Ha! yes, indeed, but not the way that I was destined to play it.

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| 20 | ... | gxf6 |
| 21 | Qc5 | Kf8 |
| 22 | Bf1 | Qxc5 |
| 23 | Rxc5 | Ke7 |
| 24 | e3 | Rdc8 |
| 25 | Rdc1 | Kd7 |
| 26 | f4 | |



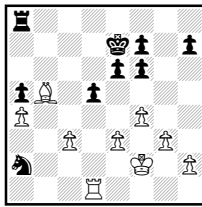
This is certainly not best, although it does not throw away all the advantage. For a start it is better to play f2-f3, if the aim is just to bring the king to the centre. But also the tactical 26 Nd4 Bxa4 27 Rxc8 Rxc8 28 Ra1 Bc6 29 Rxa5 was more promising than I had thought.

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| 26 | ... | Na6 |
| 27 | R5c3 | Nb4 |
| 28 | Rcd1 | |



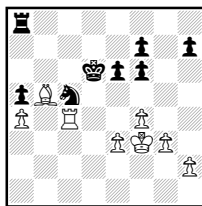
No doubt he would have been happy to repeat moves had I opted for 28 Rc5 Na6 29 R5c3 etc.

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| 28 | ... | Ke7 |
| 29 | Kf2 | Bxb5 |
| 30 | Bxb5 | Rxc3 |
| 31 | bxc3 | Na2 |



He was brave to play this in time trouble, but it is playable because he has a potential knight check on e4 - which is the main reason why 26 f3 would have been better than 26 f4.

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| 32 | c4 | Nc3 |
| 33 | Rd3 | Ne4+ |
| 34 | Kf3 | Nc5 |
| 35 | Rc3 | Ne4 |
| 36 | Rd3 | Nc5 |
| 37 | Rd4 | dxc4 |
| 38 | Rxc4 | Kd6 |

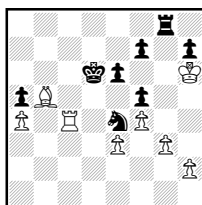


White has lost much of his advantage through cumulative inaccuracies, but he still has a bishop in an open position and a target to aim at on h7. I should now have played 39 e4! to keep my opponent's king restricted and to inhibit him from playing ... f5, and then he would have had a difficult decision as how to stop my king from marching to attack the h-pawn. There are still good winning chances for White here. I find it difficult to explain why I played the king march straight away, despite the obvious dangers. It is many years since I lost a game like this.

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| 39 | Kg4 | Rg8+ |
| 40 | Kh5 | f5! |
| 41 | Kh6 | |

Now I had completely lost my head. It was safest to play 41 Kh4, retreat to safety and offer a draw. Also, I can play 41 Rd4+ Ke7 and now 42 Kh6., since after 42 ... Ne4 43 Rd7+ (forcing Black's king to f6, which is where he wants his knight to be)

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| 41 | ... | Ne4 |
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| 42 | Rc6+?? * | Kd5 |
| 43 | Kh5 | Rg4 |
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A tragi-comic way to lose, but my opponent deserves credit for holding onto his position as best he could, and for such a long time.

* Jonathan had assumed the position was already lost but the game can still be saved. e.g. 42 Rd4+ Kc5 followed by the difficult to find 43 Be2. 42 Kh5 with the same idea also holds.

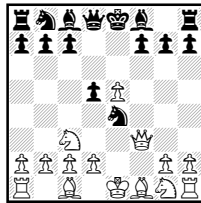
White : Steve Swanson
Black : Jonathan Rogers

Herts v Essex 8/11/08 Board 2

Vienna opening Notes by Jonathan Rogers

Notes in italics by Ivor Smith

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| 1 | e4 | e5 |
| 2 | Nc3 | Nf6 |
| 3 | f4 | d5 |
| 4 | fxe5 | Nxe4 |
| 5 | Qf3 | |

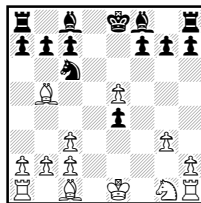


A surprise but not an unpleasant one. How can this be White's best move? *Although 5 Nf3 or 5 d3 are more usual Qf3 is a move with a long history and is still played from time to time. If 5 d3 Black should avoid 5 ... Qh4+ for after 6 g3 Nxc3 7 Nf3 Qh5 8 Nxd5 White is clearly better.*

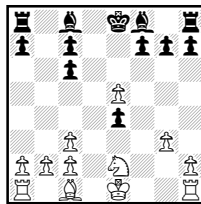
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| 5 | ... | Nc6 |
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Inviting 6 Nxe4 when 6 ... Nd4! favours Black.

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| 6 | Bb5 | Nxc3 |
| 7 | dxc3 | Qh4+ |
| 8 | g3 | Qe4+ |
| 9 | Qxe4 | dx4 |



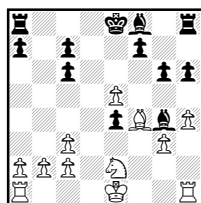
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| 10 | Bxc6+ | bx6 |
| 11 | Ne2 | |



All played very quickly by my opponent and it turned out that he had had this position before. I found it surprising that anyone would knowingly aim for this position as White.

After 9 ... dxe4 the position is considered to be equal. However 10 Bf4 followed by O-O-O is surely a better way for White to continue.

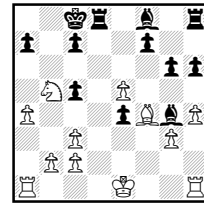
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| 11 | ... | g6 |
| 12 | Bf4 | h6 |
| 13 | h4 ? | Bg4 ! |



White's position looks critical already, and this move stops him castling and from coordinating

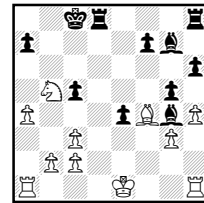
his rooks at all. It comes at a price, but a relatively low one.

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| 14 | Nd4 | c5 |
| 15 | Nb5 | O-O-O !? |
| 16 | a4 | |

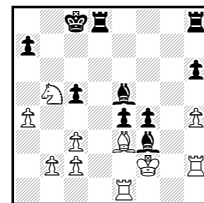


Afraid to play 16 Nxa7+ Kb7 17 Nb5 Bg7, when Black is ready to play ... g5 and ... Bxe5.; and 18 Kf2 Bf3! renews the threat of ...g5 The attack is inevitable now and White might as well grab what he can.

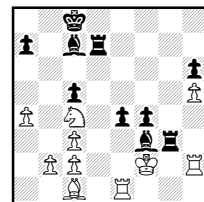
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| 16 | ... | Bg7 |
| 17 | e6 | Bxe6 |
| 18 | Nxc7 | Bg4 |
| 19 | Nb5 | g5 ! -+ |



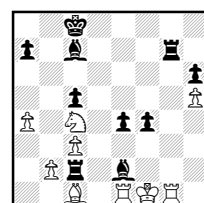
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| 20 | Be3 | Bf3 |
| 21 | Rh2 | Be5 |
| 22 | Kf2 | f5 |
| 23 | Re1 | f4 |
| 24 | gxf4 | gxf4 |



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|----|------------|------------|
| 25 | Bc1 | Rd7 |
| 26 | Na3 | Bc7 |
| 27 | h5 | Rg8 |
| 28 | Nc4 | Rg3 |



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|----|------------|-------------|
| 29 | Rh4 | Rg2+ |
| 30 | Kf1 | Rdg7 |
| 31 | Rh1 | Rxc2 |
| 32 | Rg1 | Be2+ |



0-1

After 33 Rxe2 Rxc1+ wins a whole rook.