

Strong starts and weekends

OH DEAR, barely off the plane and back into those weekenders again, at the 10th annual tournament at Islington, London. It is easy to forget just how tough these free-for-all events are: this time there were several hundred participants, including a number of masters fighting it out for the top places.

And none of this relaxed one-round-a-day stuff — here it's first round on Friday evening, three rounds on Saturday, and two on Sunday. There was a three-way tie for first between Grandmaster John Nunn, International Master Jonathan Mestel and an American player, J. Taylor.

Nunn scythed impressively through the field with aggressive straightforward chess reminiscent in style to that of Bobby Fischer. His favourite double-edged line of late has been a critical sacrificial line in the Pelikan variation of the Sicilian defence: 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Bxf6 gxf6 10.Nd5 f5 11.Bxb5!? axb5 12.Nxb5 with an extremely complicated and unclear position — just his element! One of his games against Daniel King in round one went 12...Ra4 (along with a 12...Ra5 a recommended defence), but Nunn later won brilliantly by playing ...c4!, allowing the rook to capture, and then ...b4! with an overwhelming b5, b6, b7, b8 in the offing!

In round four, openings analyst Nigel Povah tried a current theoretical alternative against the piece sacrifice with 12...Qa5!? ch 13.c3 Qa4, but after half an hour's thought Nunn found 14.Ndc7 ch Kd8 15.Qd5!, effectively refuting Black's plan, and once again a later advance of the queenside pawns was crushing. Nunn considered his best game was as Black in a Pirc, however, and I think you may agree.

LONDON 1978 MODERN DEFENCE

R. Britton	J. Nunn
1. e4	g6
2. d4	Bg7
3. Nc3	d6
4. Nf3	a6!

An interesting idea of expansion on the queenside before castling, which, although it looks unsound, is difficult to refute. Nunn wouldn't give away any of his secrets when we looked at the game afterwards, except to comment "fine move!"

5. Be2	b5
6. 0-0	Nd7
7. Re1?	

White must play more aggressively in order to exploit Black's neglected development, for example, 7.a4! b4 8.Na2 a5 9.c3 c5 10.e5! — hacking at the pawn chain. Any opening up of the game must be to Britton's favour, since he is already castled.

7. ...	c5
8. d5	Ngf6

And now Nunn is poised for castling, having already achieved the standard break of ... b5 which Black plays for in this sort of position. Threat: 9...b4 10...Nxe4 to follow.

9. Bf1	0-0
10. h3	Bb7
11. a3	Qc7
12. Bf4	Rad8
13. Qd2	Ne5!

So that if 14.Nxe5, then 14...dxe5 15.Bh6 e6 wins a pawn.

14. Qe3	e6
15. Bxe5	dxe5



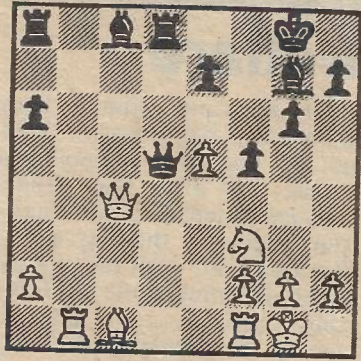
to wriggle out through 35.Qa5 during the game, leaving the square g5 vacant for his king, but it is to no avail — our GM had it all calculated: 35.Qa5 R×g2 ch 36.K×g2 Nf4 ch 37.Kf3 Qd3 ch 38.Kf2 Qe2 ch 39. Kg3 Qg2 ch 40.Kh4 Qf2 ch and now 41.Kg5 Ne6 ch and 42... Qh4 mate, or 41.Ng3 Ng2 ch and 42... Qf4 mate.

round, against South African player David Friedgood. The opening was a transposition into a sort of Grunfeld defence, but my plans were rudely disrupted when David played what I call an almost illegal move — 1.Rd1!! — (ugh). If I hadn't accepted this incredible offer of the Queen, I would have lost my own Queen. In fact, in the game I limped on with 1...Be6 2.R×d5 B×d5 but lost naturally in the end. The point is, what happens if I take his Queen?

My not too successful result at Islington can be primarily attributed to an unfortunate accident in the second-to-last

LONDON 1978

CHANDLER



FRIEDGOOD

1.Rd1!! Q×c4 2.R×d8 ch Bf8 (2...Kf7 3.Ng5 happens to be mate) 3.Bh6 Bb7 (3...Qf7 doesn't even equalise the material after 4.Ng5) 4.R×a8 B×a8 5.Rb8! and I must resign — where is my back-rank mate?? The gods seem to have conspired against me to let his bishop on h6 protect c1 in addition to mating me. So, as you can see, it really wasn't my fault that I lost, I mean, cor blimey, mate!

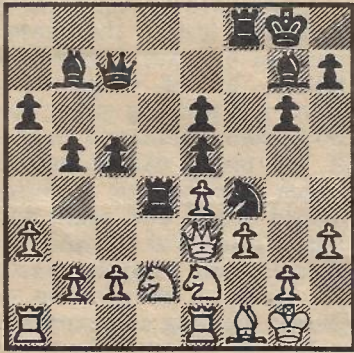
MURRAY CHANDLER

16. d×e6 f×e6

And now Nunn thought Black's position was better for sure, because of the potential exchange sacrifice on d4. He also criticised Britton's next move, but it is hard to suggest a constructive alternative.

17. Nd2 Rd4
18. f3 Nh5
19. Ne2 Nf4!

NUNN



BRITTON

"I didn't even want to play 19... Nf4," said Nunn. "I just wanted to force him to take my rook!" The point of Nunn's last move is that White cannot decline the material with 20.c3 because of 20...Rd3.

20. N×d4 e×d4
21. Qf2 Be5!

Black has seized complete control of the Black squares as positional compensation for his investment. White cannot try 22.g3 Nh5 23.f4 g5 24.Qf3, as then 24...Ng7, and his position falls apart.

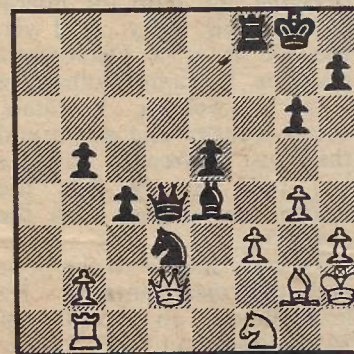
22. a4 Nh5
23. g4 Bg3

The material is already coming back with returns of a winning position.

24. Qe2 Nf4
25. Qd1 c4
26. a×b5 a×b5
27. Bg2 B×e1
28. Q×e1 e5
29. Nf1 Qc5
30. Kh2 d3
31. c×d3 N×d3
32. Qd2 Qd4
33. Rb1 B×e4!!

Nunn had recommended this game to me as containing "millions of sacrifices", and I was just inquiring where they all were when he demonstrated his 33rd move, the start of a beautiful clinching combination.

NUNN



BRITTON

34. f×e4 Rf2
35. Qg5 R×g2 chl
36. K×g2 Nf4 ch
37. Resigns

Mate with Queen and knight is forced. A neat sample variation might go: 37.Kf3 Qd3 ch 38.Kf2 Qe2 ch 39.Kg3 Qg2 ch 40.Kh4 Qf2 ch 41.Ng3 Ng2 checkmate! Very cute.

White could have also tried