

HASSRA NATIONAL CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL 2016.

On Saturday 10th September 2016 I participated in the HASSRA National Chess Championship Final 2016. HASSRA stands for Health & Social Security Recreational Association. It is now the sports and leisure association for current and former staff working for the Department of Health, Department for Work & Pensions, the Food Standards Agency and associated executive agencies and public bodies. The tournament was staged at Warwick University as part of the HASSRA September Sports Festival. During my 40 years in the Civil Service, the HASSRA Chess Championship has changed format several times. It is now a one-day quick play event organised as a 6 round Swiss Tournament. Players have a maximum of 30 minutes for all moves in each game. I have limited experience in this form of the game, preferring 3 or 4 hour playing sessions. Keeping a game score is optional and puts those who do at a disadvantage compared with participants who decide not to bother. Having qualified for the Final in the past, but chosen not to participate, I opted to attend this year with a view to seeking the views of other players concerning the format.

Twelve players were due to feature in the competition but one withdrew on the day because of illness. Unfortunately, this resulted in a bye in every round. The range of playing ability was large. Several of us just had a standard play grade and while others were ungraded altogether. At the top was Ben Collinson (Norfolk) followed by Bill Hewitt (South Wales).

Round 1.

My seeding was 7 – top of the bottom half of the draw – so I faced number 1 seed, Ben Collinson (East of England), who was allocated the white pieces. He built up a strong attack but overlooked moves that would probably have given him a win. This is hardly surprising, having regard to the time control. When I offered a draw, he had just over $\frac{3}{4}$ minute left to my $2\frac{1}{4}$ minutes. My half point was the only score registered by players in the bottom half of the draw. (5 players on 1/1.)

Round 2.

White against Jim Murray (Scotland) whose grade was quoted as 130. This must have been converted from the Scottish grading list which uses ELO but 'Chess Scotland' prevents non-members from obtaining access to the database! Bill's final score suggests that he is somewhat stronger than 130 or played significantly above this level on the day. I tried a Torre Attack against Jim's King's Indian Defence but obtain no advantage whatsoever and a draw was agreed in a level position. (Bill Hewitt took the lead outright on 2/2 by defeating 3rd seed, Alfredo Luaces.)

Round 3.

Black against Tony Gannon (North West) whose estimated grade was shown as 85. He plays on the Internet but not at a club. Having faced him and seen him play parts of other games, I consider his actual playing strength to be around 120-130. My French Defence was met with the Exchange Variation. Despite my efforts to unbalance the position, the game was eventually agreed drawn. (Each of us with King, Queen, Knight and 8 pawns.) I pushed my luck in an attempt to win but had to accept repetition of moves to avoid material loss. I subsequently urged Tony to play at a club as his ability will certainly improve meeting opposition over the board. (Bill Hewitt was held to a draw by Iain Dobbs - East Midlands - and joined in the lead on $2\frac{1}{2}/3$ by Ben Collinson who defeated Sean Hewitt - London).

Round 4.

I was paired with Neil Macdonald (Fylde) who the final tournament score shows to be the weakest player in the competition. After 9 moves I was a rook for pawn ahead and delivered checkmate on move 19. (Number 2 seed - Bill Hewitt - defeated number 1 seed, Ben Collinson, to lead the field by a full point.)

Round 5.

White against the tournament leader. I had no intention of being ground down in a positional encounter, so it's 'Blackmar-Diemer Gambit Time'! (A great opening for chess played at a fast time control.) Bill subsequently admitted that there were a number of points where he avoided mistakes at the last moment. After the initial gambit pawn, I threw in another to fuel the attack but black defended accurately, eventually forcing resignation after 24 moves. (Alfredo Luaces, (South East), Iain Dodds (East Midlands) and Jim Murray (Scotland) all won to stay within a point of the leader, Bill Hewitt.)

Round 6.

An anti-climax. I was allocated the bye but this offered an opportunity to record the leader's final game. In a completely winning position, Bill Hewitt took a draw which was sufficient to win the title. Iain Dodds and Ben Collinson drew, leaving Alfredo Luaces and Jim Murray to contest runner-up spot. Alfredo had a winning endgame position but fell victim to a clever swindle. Faced with unavoidable mate on the move, he resigned, giving the Celts a 1-2.

Final Table.

1.	William A. R. Hewitt	182	Wales	5
2.	Jim Murray	130	Scotland	4½
3.	Iain Dodds	156	East Midlands	4
4=	Sean D. Hewitt	163	London	3½
4=	Alfredo Luaces	165	South East	3½
4=	David G. Mills	138	Yorkshire and the Humber	3½
4=	Arnold Peace	139	West Midlands	3½
8	Ben Collinson	188	East of England	3
9	Tony Gannon	UG	North West	2½
10	Patrick Barnard	UG	South East	2
11	Neil Macdonald	UG	Fylde	1

William Hewitt was the best player on the day and a worthy winner. The table is rather unkind to Ben Collinson who played 6 of the 7 highest placed competitors. The Swiss pairing system is good for determining a winner but the subsequent placings are something of a lottery.

Round 1. Collinson, B. - Mills, D. G. [C00]

HASSRA Final 2016. Round 1. 10.9.2016.

1.e4 e6 2.d3 b6 3.Nf3 c5 4.g3 Bb7 5.Bg2 Nc6 6.0-0 d6 7.c3 Nf6 8.Re1 e5 9.Nbd2 Be7 10.Nf1 0-0 11.Ne3 Re8 12.Nf5 Bf8 13.h4 Bc8 14.Nh2 Bxf5 15.exf5 Rc8 16.g4 Kh8 17.g5 Ng8 18.Bd5 Qc7 19.Ng4 Nd8 20.Qf3 Ne7 21.Be4 Ng8 22.h5 f6 23.Kg2 Be7 24.h6 gxh6 25.gxh6 Bf8 26.Bd5 Nf7 27.Rh1 Qe7 28.Rh5 Rc7 29.Be3 b5 30.Rg1 a5 31.Kh1 b4 32.Qe4 bxc3 33.bxc3 Rb8 34.Qc4 Rb2 35.a4 Ra7 36.Bc1 Rb8 37.Re1 Rd8 38.f4 Qc7 39.fxe5 dxe5 40.Rg1 Rd7 ½-½

