

MK Phoenix – Special report

The international road trip

By Brian Valentine



First the team was formed as Milton Keynes, then the halcyon days of FCA solutions returning from the ashes as MK Phoenix. We have been an evolving 4NCL institution. At various times we have various times extended chess into 4NCL rapidplay, but not much else. Ah yes there is the annual party and this year's hatched up the idea of a trip to sample the Gibraltar Chess Festival.

The project was reduced in size as we all sobered up. Kevin Williamson, John Shaw, Adrian Matthews and I decided that the second week Challengers over 5 days was the best solution. While John, Kevin and I tried to co-ordinate flights and hotel, Adrian went straight off and got booked. Cheap flights arise from booking early so we chose to fly Monarch from Luton. Well that turned out expensive for Kevin, who booked by debit card, and irksome for the others who used a credit card. We ended up by using BA from Heathrow, but ended up in Adrian's hotel downtown. By the time we entered the competition we noted Femi was also in the hat. He must have flown in by private jet and stayed in some executive suite elsewhere. Our paths didn't cross outside the venue, but Femi's games were the most interesting!

My wife Heather came along as our cultural attaché, the most useful bit being finding new restaurants for our evening meal. Sohrab Panday, a member of John's Belper club joined as an associate team member for the trip. Stewart Reuben stayed in the Caleta and had his own board (#81) as the occasional filler in the Masters.

This report is intended to follow editorial policy and to concentrate on the chess. Most of this is in the magazine section in the pgn file attached, I thought I'd give a brief summary of the non chess events since games were only supposed to take up about four hours each day.

We preferred downtown to staying in the main hotel. The Caleta is a good hotel, but it is about 15 minutes by bus to the Gibraltar attractions. If you can get in, then it is ideal if you want a 24-hour chess experience. However, we will not be recommending returning to the Bristol. It is central and comfortable enough, but it has a tired and dated feel. The breakfasts were very disappointing and we soon found somewhere nearby.

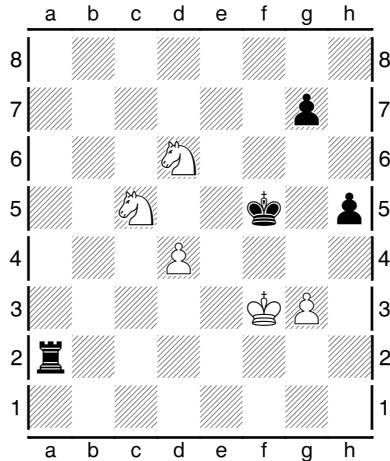
The Bristol contingent had four meals at different restaurants as recommended by Heather and then returned to the one voted the best for the final night. I suspect we would have problems with this strategy if staying the two weeks.



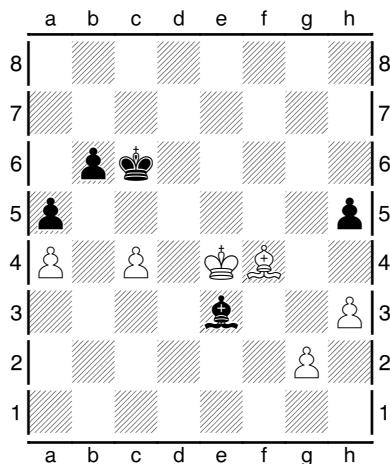
The entrants were a cosmopolitan bunch. I played a German living in the US, another German, a Philippine based in Dubai, A Nigerian based in the UK and a Norwegian.

I'd like to think readers were watching our games live on the internet, but those with lives might like being enlightened. The entries were strong by our standards. John elected to drop down to the Amateur B Swiss where he was in the 3rd Quartile. The remainder of us were in the bottom quarter of the Challengers B event.

The time limit was all moves in 110 minutes plus 10 seconds a move. This is rather unusual for a one game a day event, but fitted with the needs of us being finished before the big guns came in for 2nd sitting. What tended to happen is that the match would start at a leisurely county game speed and slowly descend into blitz. This lead to a lot of illegal rules and of course nowadays two illegal moves lose the game. For instance, you might wonder why Black lost with about three minutes on this clock here.



White is the young lady with an excellent pedigree, Anna Cramling Bellon against Sebastian Gueler. He played 66....Ke6 and lost because it was his second illegal move, having done the same thing some minutes before.



This was the position in a critical 4th round encounter between Plotkin and Sousa. In the blitz period **Black** played Bf4xBc3. With a 1st prize of £2,000, I do not recommend 10 seconds additions for games that reach blitz conditions typically around move 40. It makes all the hard work of the middle game at risk in that early minefield. On the other hand some guy called Aronian won the Masters with the decisive game having 2 second increments. Adrian used the illegal move to his advantage, making one in the increment stage for him. His opponent's clock went from 60 to 62 minutes with the obligatory 2 minute penalty; Adrian got time to sort out the drawing variation while the clock was being reset.

The good news for our contingent is that although we populated the bottom few boards we were never paired together. The stand out performance was by John. He scored 2.5 points and amongst those with the same score had the hardest draw. In round 2 (unfortunately censored on line at present) he took on the top seed and misplayed a two-move mate to "only" get a draw. I had one of my best results in recent times getting 2.5 points also falling a whisker short of a 2100 TPR, but I did have my shortest ever defeat. The magazine section will show how close Femi came to beating one of the eventual winners. Femi finished on 1.5 points as did the others.

For Kevin it was one disaster after another. On the first day he lost his glasses; sharp eyed Heather noticed a pair on a ledge later that day. The evening after the waiter had pointed out that Spain has no upper limit on touch pad credit cards he mislaid his credit cards; after a frantic search they appeared under his bed.

On the final day we went down the road for the now customary breakfast in the Gibraltar Arms. He was sitting with Adrian who remembered he had left something at the hotel. Time went by and the meal arrived, after a while we began to worry what had happened to Adrian, with poor Kevin all on his own. Then a call from Adrian: "where exactly is breakfast?". The amazed Kevin explained where the pub was and duly Adrian arrived from the wrong direction! In his haste he had right passed it. On getting back to Heathrow we found that the unfortunate Kevin had a car with a flat tyre. We decided that the tyre had come out in sympathy about the time of Kevin's deflating second consecutive defeat!

In the final round he tells us was still in preparation with a promising position. However, at that point there was a major commotion in the playing hall with the security guards restraining a player. Kevin's opponent was clearly playing "uncle" to the player involved. His obvious concern was enough for Kevin to agree a draw. Some things are more important than a chess game. Fortunately the situation soon resolved itself.

Talking of more serious issues. There was a huge gale blowing on Monday morning. The bus failed to arrive. Two other contestants went off to find a taxi. They returned to say all the taxis were stuck in a traffic jam arising from some scaffolding collapsing on a thoroughfare. Fortunately a bus on the less regular route arrived in time. The gales continued and as we went to go home it was made clear there were no buses at all now. This time there was a rockfall between the town and the Caleta. Us calmer individuals went around collecting as much information as possible and had luck when a rare taxi arrived to take us "the other way" back to town. This route involved going through a long tunnel prohibited to pedestrians. Factfinding was not in the DNA of Kevin and Adrian so they sped off to aforesaid tunnel. The tunnel was actually OK, not much traffic due to the situation and a path most of the way. On leaving the tunnel they stopped for Kevin to take a call from his wife. To their horror, while waiting a car came round a corner lost control and demolished a lamp post. The driver was not hurt but the lads had to spend a while on traffic duty.

And now to the chess. The selection is based on my recollection of the interesting incidents usual based on the after-match analysis. I have included all the moves, but for brevity you can just look at positions where I have added commentary. The scores can be found in the attached pgn file.