

A HISTORY OF

BALLARAT

By Douglas Hamilton

The first Begonia Cup/Ballarat Open passed pretty much unnoticed in Melbourne and the broader Australian chess world. Tournaments weren't common back in 1967 but there were always a few, for the most part primarily of local interest, and it was assumed Ballarat would be one of those. 1968 was a different story, however; prize money of significance, a state-wide appeal for entries and the Begonia Cup was up and running as a major annual event, something it has continued to do for fifty years. The following is a personal reminiscence of Ballarat, based on my having played in the 1968 reprise and the majority of those since. For me it's always been the most appealing tournament on the annual calendar, a wonderful combination of serious chess with country-style warmth and hospitality, and it has been one of the regrets of my time in chess to have been forced to miss the last two. So I'm really hoping that the club doesn't stop at fifty!

The chess scene in 1968 would be almost unrecognisable to today's young players. At a personal level I was hoping against hope that the magnificent Mischa Tal would recover his health sufficiently to teach Bobby Fischer another

lesson, it often being forgotten in Fischer hagiographies that Tal trounced him 4-0 in their first Candidates tournament together. But while chess had a big international profile then, the Australian chess community was still a small one, the game widely viewed as one of those decadent European activities that healthy Australians would do well to avoid.

The tournament was however a huge success right from the start. Ballarat itself – which currently provides the background to the ABC's 'Doctor Blake Mysteries' series – is a beautiful town and easily accessible from Melbourne, and the Labour Day weekend early in autumn proved to be ideal timing, so pretty well all the top Melbourne players would play. As the news got around entries also started to come from NSW, SA and even as far away as Queensland. What these players would find to their surprise was the huge number of country players who otherwise had no real opportunity to enter a serious event who could not only play, but play extremely well. As a Melbourne player, I'd find myself getting regularly knocked off by some bloke I'd never met before who would then tell me that he didn't have the time to practise any more what with the ploughing and everything, but that he still enjoyed the occasional game.

One of the really good aspects to Ballarat, one that caused considerable controversy when first introduced, has been that of the accelerated Swiss system. In this, for the first two rounds pairings are made using the assumption that the higher-rated players (50% of the field) have each won an additional game, and the lower-rated players have each lost one. That has had a two-fold benefit, the first being that lower-rated players have a better chance to win their first two games than they would otherwise have had, and that some therefore get the chance to play top players in the third round with a couple of points under their belts. The second is that the games in the first two rounds are played between players whose ratings are closer together than they would otherwise have been and hence are tougher and more interesting than would have been expected under the usual system. There was some argument at first, but I think the approach reflects the belief that weekenders should be as much about all players in the field having fun as they are about winning, and playing hard but possibly winnable games go a long way towards ensuring that.

Another aspect that distinguished Ballarat for a long time – as long as the event was held in the School of Mines which I would think must have been for thirty years or so – was the Pit. The tournament set-up typically has had to cater for fifty games or so, sometimes more, and there was during that period a big room in two sections that held most of the tables. There was however a smaller side section, known as the Pit, about five steps down from the main area, which always held the ten tables on which the top games would be played. One floor above and surrounding two sides of the Pit was a gallery from which spectators could obtain a bird's-eye view of the games, and this would be densely populated particularly at times towards the end of a tournament when a key game developed along dramatic lines. So everybody wanted to play their games there if they could score well enough and just how it

rated was made most evident to me one day when I was having a pre-game chat to a player I'd never met before. "My sixth Ballarat, Doug," he said with a big grin on his face and doing an air -punch, "and my first time in the Pit, so I hope you're ready for trouble." I can't remember the game itself now, but I like to think I was and that we had a typical Ballarat game – full of errors, full of entertainment.

Personal memories of Ballarat abound of course and I won't go on about them here. Just one that I've mentioned elsewhere but that sticks in the mind was the last night from one of the seventies events. My peer group of players was younger then, fitter and to say the least more committed to ocker traditions than we are now, and there had been an epic celebration of the Begonia at Craig's Hotel. That was pretty typical of those years and wouldn't warrant mention here if not for the telephone call my wife received about 2am the next morning, during which she was asked to (a) make the ninety minute drive to Bacchus Marsh (b) buy a can of petrol on the way and (c) bring money. "There's four of you in the car?" she said disbelievingly, "and none of you has got any money?" "It's been a big night," was the best I had. In our marital history, even now that event receives more attention than I think it warrants. Anne just sighs and tells people that chessplayers tend to be pretty odd people.

All this has been somewhat fragmented but I suppose I see the Ballarat years as a collage rather than as coherent series of events! The short time limits usually in place, coupled with the wide range of players at different rating levels and with differing expectations have made for games long on entertainment and light on for accuracy. Times are changing; there are many more good players around now, all of whom are far better versed in positional play than were the older generations, but still I think – and hope – that error will remain the lifeblood of a true Ballarat game!

What remains to be said is that keeping a Swiss weekend tournament going for fifty years is an extraordinary achievement that is testimony to the energy, imagination and commitment of the Ballarat chess community. That great man, Cecil Purdy, once wrote a very moving piece about the huge debt chessplayers owe to the people willing to sacrifice time and energy to put tournaments on, a view that I must endorse here. Ballarat has each year been able to find the people required to run an event involving a hundred or more contestants, and to do that efficiently and well every time. I don't know how they've done it, but they deserve every Australian chessplayer's gratitude and admiration.

D. Hamilton - L. Li

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6 5 Nc3
Qc7 6 Be3 a6 7 Be2 Nf6 8 O-O Bb4 9 Na4 Be7
10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Nb6 Rb8 12 Nxc8 Qxc8 13
Bd4 c5 14 Be5 Rb6



DRAW AGREED.

TOURNAMENT REPORT

2016 BALLARAT BEGONIA FESTIVAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY OPEN



50 MOVES APRIL 2016

BALLARAT REPORT

The first Ballarat Open was held in 1967 and has been held every year since. It's interesting reconstructing the historical context of that first tournament. Roy Emerson had beaten Arthur Ashe in the Australian Open Tennis final in January and The Beatles had recently signed a worldwide recording contract, whilst poor old Carl Wilson of The Beach Boys had just been indicted for dodging the Vietnam War draft in the US.

It was a 6 round tournament back then, very civilised, although to the veritable football team of players who took a half point bye in round 5 this year to avoid a three game day, it mattered little. The convincing winner in 1967 was the venerable Arthur Teters with 6/6, the only picket fence in the tournament's history until 2015, when Kanan Izzat scored his brilliant 7/7.

Two players contesting the inaugural 1967 event were 13 year old Arthur Koelle, who now spends most of his time in the delightful German city of Hangover (or is it Hanover?) and a youthful version of Kevin Per-

rin, both of whom were singled out for special mention as entrants this year.

The organisers were determined to make the 50th anniversary event a special one and achieved a major coup with the signing of former World Championship challenger Nigel Short as a participant. They also offered conditions for a number of significant past winners to entice them to play, some lured out of semi-retirement by the smell of cheese dangled before their noses, myself being one of them.

A minor controversy arose when it was revealed that the 2016 tournament would not be FIDE rated, despite being rated in previous years under the same format. It turns out Nigel Short preferred that it not be FIDE rated, but did not make that a condition of entry, as he had already agreed to play. The organisers published an explanation on ChessChat for not rating it which was rather broader than just Short's preference, but that undoubtedly carried the most weight. Short can hardly be blamed for expressing his

preference though and considering his importance as a very significant drawcard it is understandable, if contentious in some quarters, that the organisers lent that way. 'Ye cannae please everyone', as a wise Scotsman no doubt once said.

Apart from the participation of a famous world class player and some notables of Australian chess history, the rich prize list ensured that many of the current crop of star players were there to do battle. Some of the threats to Short, who by the way is very tall, included Australian Championship winner Kanan Izzat, Australian Champion title holder Bobby Cheng, previous Australian Champion Max Illingworth and Olympiad top board Zong-Yuan Zhao, not to mention an assortment of dangerous IMs like Anton Smirnov, Junta Ikeda and Brodie McClymont. 13-time winner, GM Darryl Johansen was probably the sentimental favourite with many, but at 57 years of age weekenders are no longer his forte. The generous budget extended to securing the services of top flight commentator GM Ian Rogers and even producing a commemora-



Left:

One of the Catholic churches in Ballarat covered in ribbons as an apology for the widespread child sexual abuse which took place there.

tive book with historical information that I have shamelessly plagiarised and some interesting musings from past winners. For those interested, a list of sponsors can no doubt be found somewhere. I do recall that regular sponsor David Cordover appeared to be absent, but fortunately the mysterious Rex Noir filled that gap.

A report on the tournament wouldn't be complete without mentioning the great Bay of Pigs fiasco on the Thursday night before the event, where Nigel Short mercilessly mowed down 31 of the best and brightest locals in a simul, winning every single game. What the...? Take a long, hard look at yourselves, Ballarat players! Elliot Renzies ranked it alongside the Eureka Stockade for the sheer scale of massacre.

So with all the pieces in place for an epic tournament it would be fair to say that quite a buzz surrounded this event and all the cracks from

near and far duly mustered at Clarendon College for Round 1... 152 players in all. The Mayor of Ballarat turned up at the opening ceremony dressed in a weekend fishing outfit, but recovered with an excellent speech and duly declared the tournament open.

ROUND 1

On Board 1 Nigel Short was playing a person alleged to be Frank Meerbach, but without the enormous white Father Christmas beard. To make sure it was really him I just went to 'Compare Ze Meerbach.com'. Like Sampson, the shorn Meerbach didn't seem to be quite right and found himself a whole, healthy pawn down after four moves. Similar to my worst performing stock, Slater and Gordon, he was then heavily 'shorted' and never recovered.

To my great excitement I noticed that Jesus appeared to have entered the tournament, perhaps on the urging of Stephen Solomon. I expected him to be the top seed (no disrespect to Nigel) and was surprised to see him down on board 72 playing Black against the aforementioned Elliot Renzies and passing himself off as someone called Guy Russo. I double checked and he was definitely a dead ringer for the Nazarene, although his loss to Elliot had me wondering if it could possibly be a case of mistaken identity. (Turns out Guy has some chess related stuff on You Tube.)

Most of the top boards went as expected, with one exception. The exotically named Francesco Antoniazzi (1751) conceded a draw with White to Bobby Cheng (2499). I tried to find him after the game to tell him, 'Well that was a waste of the white pieces', but he had already gone off to celebrate.



Nigel Short shows one of his wins in the commentary
Photo: Cathy Rogers

ROUND 2

In the evening round things started to get more interesting, with Leonid Sandler restoring some battered pride for the locals against Short, drawing with White after the GM had to sac the exchange to prosecute his attack. Sandler was distinctly better for some time, but never clearly winning against Short's cool-headed defence.

On Board 5 the talented Kevin Sheldrick, rated 2060, played well in the complicated g7-pawn-grabbing line of the Winawer to beat IM Anton Smirnov, rated 2512.

Sheldrick, Kevin

Smirnov, Anton

Ballarat Open 2016

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 c5
5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 Ne7 7.Qg4 cxd4**

8.Qxg7 Rg8 9.Qxh7 Qc7 10.Ne2 Nbc6 11.f4 dxc3 12.Qd3 d4 13.Rb1 b6 14.Nxd4 Nxd4 15.Qxd4 Bb7 16.Rb3 Rc8 17.Rg1 Nf5 18.Qf2 Bd5 19.Rb1 Bc4 20.g4 Ne7 21.Rg3 Bxf1 22.Qxf1 Nd5 23.h3 Kd8 24.Qd3 Qc6 25.Rb4 Rc7 26.Rd4 Kc8 27.h4 f6 28.h5 Kb7 29.a4 fxe5 30.fxe5 Rf8 31.Rg1 Rcf7 32.Bh6 Rg8 33.Rf1 Rxf1+ 34.Qxf1 Qc7 35.Qe2 Qh7 36.Bc1 Rf8 37.a5 Qe7 38.a6+ Kb8 39.g5 Rf5 40.g6 Qc5 41.Qe4 Qf8 42.Be3 Rf1+ 43.Ke2 Rb1 44.Bf4 Rb5 45.h6 Rc5 46.g7 Qf7 47.Bg3 Qg8 48.Qg4 Rc8...

1 - 0

On Board 8, dangerous veteran Brian Jones turned up almost half an hour late against Darryl Johansen, but played with spirited aggression and on move 26, when Johansen snaffled a poisoned prawn, Jones launched a winning assault with a pseudo piece sac. I will now try and describe what happened next. On move 29 Jones missed mate in 8 but was still winning. However, on move 30, instead of taking Johansen's queen for a straightforward

win, he found a brilliant (but losing) rook sacrifice. Darryl was so shocked to still have his queen that he forgot to sac it on e4, winning easily, instead making another fatal mistake.

Jones now took the queen at the worst possible moment and with the capture of a bishop on move 32 by Johansen it would have been all over red rover. Instead, Darryl overfinessed with a dodgy zwischenzug and Jones was soon much better again, albeit down to his 30-second increment.

Johansen defended well with rook and two knights against queen and one knight and by move 42 had a forced draw. Instead, he had a rush of blood to the head and played for mate, losing the exchange in the process.

Now Jones had to win a queen versus 2 knights position with assorted pawns each, at blitz speed, with the knights well coordinated. Despite still being objectively quite winning, his nerve failed him and he decided



Left:

Malcolm Pyke playing against Queensland's star player Brodie McClymont



GM Zong-Yuan Zhao on the right getting warmed up for the Olympiad
Photo: Cathy Rogers

to give perpetual check. What a game! That's what chess is all about.

Jones, Brian

Johensen, Darryl

Ballarat Open 2016

**1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Bb4+ 4.Bd2
Qe7 5.g3 Nc6 6.Bg2 Bxd2+ 7.Nbxd2
d6 8.O-O O-O 9.e4 a5 10.a3 a4
11.Re1 e5 12.d5 Nb8 13.Qc2 Nfd7
14.Nh4 Nc5 15.Nf5 Qf6 16.Rad1
Nbd7 17.Rf1 Nb6 18.Kh1 Bd7
19.Rde1 Rfe8 20.Ne3 c6 21.f4 cxd5
22.fxe5 Qxe5 23.exd5 Qd4 24.Nf5
Bxf5 25.Qxf5 f6 26.Nf3 Qxc4
27.Ng5 Qd3 28.Be4 g6 29.Qh3 fxg5**

**30.Rf7 h5 31.Bxd3 Rxe1+ 32.Rf1 g4
33.Qh4 Rxf1+ 34.Bxf1 Rf8 35.Kg1
Kf7 36.Qg5 Nbd7 37.Qf4+ Ke7
38.Qg5+ Rf6 39.Qh6 Ne5 40.Qg7+
Rf7 41.Qg8 Ne4 42.Qc8 Rf2
43.Qe6+ Kd8 44.Bg2 Rxd2+ 45.Kxg2
Kc7 46.Kf1 Nd2+ 47.Ke2 Ndf3
48.Qe7+ Nd7 49.Qe4 Nde5 50.Qc2+
Kd8 51.Qxa4 Nxe2 52.Qa8+ Kc7
53.Qa5+ Kc8 54.Qa8+ Kc7 55.Qa5+**

1/2 - 1/2

The Pooch forfeits to the Gooch. As an appendix to my notes on this round, Heath Gooch got an unexpected point when his opponent, Jack Puccini, had to be rushed to hospital with suspected appendicitis. Jack reappeared in later rounds though, so either he had the troublesome organ removed, sold, and then staged a remarkable recovery, or it was a false alarm.

ROUND 3

Ah, the joys of early morning chess after 6 hours of restless sleep! At least for some of the top seeds the end of the accelerated pairings of the first two rounds brought relief via some rather one sided pairings. Not for Zong-Yuan Zhao on Board 2 though, who had to grind out a 63-move technical endgame masterpiece to finally crack the solid black defence of Erik Teichmann. Former Begonia winner Teichmann is making a comeback to chess after a stint in India and appeared well prepared and capable of giving the top seeds some curry.

On Board 4 Brodie McClymont also had a tough pairing against IM Mirko Rujevic, who has defended the Lopez more times than a politi-

cian says 'family'. Brodie missed a nice winning queen sac on his 31st move and it could have been costly, as Mirko was a pawn up with opposite bishops and a smidgen better from there on, although queens were still lurking about. Unluckily for Mirko he completely forgot that chess is played with clocks and lost on time.

On Board 13 Brendan Zou, rated 1528, drew with IM Sandler, who must have spent his entire energy budget for the tournament drawing with Short.

ROUND 4

On Board 1 Chris Wallis refuted Max Illingworth's over-ambitious handling of the Trompowsky with a nice exchange sac and appeared to be heading for a good win. Sadly for Chris he frittered away his lovely position and Max consolidated his extra material, playing the last part of the game very accurately to move to 4/4.

On Board 2 the military Junta used the white pieces to grab a short draw against Zhao. The rules didn't permit agreed draws in under 15 moves... Ikeda's draw offer came nicely timed on move 16!

On Board 3 last year's picket fence winner IM Kanan Izzat had White against IM Guy West, (aka me.) I used the Sicilian Hedgehog to run Kanan a bit short of time, but then got overexcited and lashed out with ...g5, weakening my kingside. After some clever manoeuvring Kanan provoked a losing blunder, almost stuffed it up in time pressure but eventually broke through to claim a share of the lead.

Board 4 saw a continuation of the Solomon - McClymont rivalry, which I'm told has favoured the younger player to date. Brodie appeared to equalise or better as Black in

a Loewenthal/Pelikan type pawn structure against Solo's Maroczy Bind formation. However, Steve found a nice way to sacrifice the exchange and after Brodie eschewed an equalising swap of queens the redoubtable Monosol grabbed the edge for a while. It subsequently waxed and waned, with Brodie playing his way back into it then stuffing it up on a few occasions, as you do. Suddenly though he made two bad moves in a row and Solomon quickly crashed through to become part of a leading triumvirate on 4/4.

Nigel Short was playing 'up' against dangerous IM Ari Dale with the black pieces, but produced a wonderful miniature that really showcased his class.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e3 b6

Dale, Ari

Short, Nigel

Ballarat Open 2016

5.Bd3 Bb7 6.Nf3 O-O 7.O-O Bxc3 8.bxc3 c5 9.Qc2 Bxf3 10.gxf3 Nc6 11.f4 cxd4 12.cxd4 Nb4 13.Qc3 Nxd3 14.Qxd3 d5 15.Ba3 dxc4 16.Qxc4 Rc8 17.Qa4 Re8 18.Rac1 Qd5 19.Rxc8 Rxc8 20.Qxa7 h5 21.Qxb6 Qf3 22.Qb5 Ne4 23.Bb4 Qg4+ 24.Kh1 Rc1

0 - 1

I don't really know what to make of the Board 7 game between Nathan Hibberd (1769) and GM Darryl Johansen. Johansen seemed to at least equalise out of the opening, but allowed the position to get rather blocked. However, he still seemed to be a little better and certainly in no danger of losing when a draw was agreed. Either Darryl has made the conscious decision not to worry

about his rating any more, which I guess would be rather liberating, or he just didn't feel like playing for some reason. Anyway, a good result for Hibberd.

ROUND 5

Here it was, the dreaded 7.30 pm third round of the day that has reduced so many hapless chessplayers to dull eyed, slack jawed wrecks over the years. No less than 21 of us, many of mature vintage it must be noted, elected to take half a point in the hand rather than play for two of 'em in the bush. GM Johansen, myself and IM Sandler were amongst the sensible ones, provoking a chorus of gibbering from the peanut gallery of online forums. Those who had the misfortune to be in contention and thus had to play, were encountering serious opposition by this stage.

Oh no! It's happening again. Yes indeed... with White on Board 1 the remarkable Kanan Izzat emerged from a very complex positional variation of the Nimzo Indian with dangerous kingside pressure against GM-elect Max Illingworth. The breakthrough eventually came and despite never castling himself, Izzat's white pieces swamped the back king and he moved to 5/5, his 12th consecutive win in successive Ballarats.

On Board 2 Zong-Yuan Zhao played powerful positional chess against Stephen Solomon's Czech Benoni (which failed to ever get a check in anyway) and managed to make the opening look a bit suss. Solo almost managed to get back into it a couple of times but Zhao always reasserted his grip and eventually Black unsoundly sacrificed a piece in desperation, losing quickly. This moved Zhao up to 4.5/5 and equal second. Joining him was top seed Nigel Short, who conducted another attacking gem on Board 3 with



Ari Dale playing Max Illingworth

Photo: Cathy Rogers

white against Ikeda's Sicilian. Black seemed to gain full equality out of the opening, but Short then appeared to play almost perfectly as a slashing attack materialised out of nowhere. This tournament is the first time I have seen a high-rated foreign player who is not Chinese actually look the goods against Australia's tricky new breed of IMs.

Short, Nigel 2671

Ikeda, Junta 2397

Ballarat Open 2016

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.b3 b6 4.Bb2 Bb7
5.Nc3 a6 6.d4 cxd4 7.Nxd4 Qc7
8.Qd2 Nf6 9.f3 Nc6 10.Nxc6 Bxc6**

**11.O-O-O Be7 12.Kb1 O-O 13.Bd3
b5 14.g4 d6 15.h4 Rfd8 16.Qg2 b4
17.Ne2 e5 18.Ng3 Bb5 19.g5 Nd7
20.Nf5 Nc5 21.h5 Bf8 22.f4 Nxd3
23.cxd3 a5 24.fxe5 a4 25.Nh6+ Kh8
26.g6 Be8 27.gxf7 Bxf7 28.exd6
Rxd6 29.Nf5 Bxb3 30.h6 Bxa2+
31.Ka1**

1 - 0

On Board 4 newly crowned Australian Champion Bobby Cheng dispatched the Dutch Defence of Eddy Levi, who along with IM Rujevic was doing his best to fly the flag for the old guard. I'm not convinced the Dutch is a good choice against Cheng though, as his sharp positional style is well suited to the kind of positions that arise, but Eddy has taken some big scalps with it in the past. The win earned a Bobby a slice of second with Short and Zhao.

ROUND 6

The clash many of us were waiting for, finally arrived. Unfortunately Izzat had black against Short to make his task even tougher, but nevertheless he managed full equality out of the opening with his favourite Caro-Kann and perhaps even a small advantage. Then interesting things started to happen.

Short appeared to underestimate a clever retrograde knight manoeuvre by Izzat and deployed his light squared bishop to g2, leaving a hole he'd created on c4 looking rather weak. Instead of trying to defend the weakness Short ignored it and just went on his merry way, letting Kanan occupy the outpost with the knight. Suddenly, on only move 14, Izzat was presented with a not particularly deep combination that won



Top: Teichmann playing Anton Smirnov
Bottom: Australian Champion Bobby Cheng against Eddy Levi
Photo: Pau Pascual Duran for ChessBase



either two pawns or the exchange. It's not entirely clear whether Short meant to allow it or not; he probably did, but it was perhaps his best chance at this stage anyway. Having said that, after giving up the exchange for nothing tangible, Nigel was undoubtedly hovering somewhere between a fair bit and a lot worse. Not exactly busted though, as there were no immediate inroads for Black's rooks and white's development and coordination were good.

Extraordinarily, it took only a handful of moves without any obvious blunders from Black, for White to get the upper hand. Kanan made an error on his 22nd move and from that point onward Short just took over the game. It was an impressive and crucial win, but spare a thought for the guy who would quite possibly have scored back to back picket fences at Ballarat if not for an imported super-GM.

On Board 2 Bobby Cheng quickly achieved a small advantage on the black side of a Philidor Defence, but respect for Zong-Yuan Zhao produced a draw by agreement on move 25.

On Board 3 Max Illingworth was really struggling against the King's Indian of Ari Dale until Ari got too impatient with his attack and unnecessarily sacked a bishop. I'd say he got about sixpence worth of compensation, but certainly not the full shilling worth. He then proceeded to throw every piece of wood at his disposal on the fire, including the chair he was sitting on, but Max just ate the lot and duly moved to 5.5, equal with Nigel Short.

The Board 4 clash saw Erik Teichmann emerge as the new standard bearer of the older generation on 5/6, outplaying Anton Smirnov in a bishops on opposite colours position after the young IM mishandled a weird position arising from Erik's

Orangutan Opening. As an aside, I once played the Orangutan against Bob Gibbons of New Zealand. It just seemed like the right thing to do. Strangely, Boards 9, 10 and 11 all featured 'upset' draws. On Board 9 Anthony Hain (1916) played actively with the black pieces to split the point with Darryl Johansen, hopefully making redundant his frequent reminiscences of his win over me in a 15 minute game some years ago. Meanwhile I was able to convert a crushing position against Mehmet Dizdarevic (1872) into a completely lost one, only to have the favour returned when he ran his clock down and took a perpetual. The next board down saw Tony Davis (1873) draw with White against Jack Puccini, who perhaps hadn't fully recovered from having his liver removed.

ROUND 7

So the final round arrived with Nigel Short leading the field by half a point on 5.5/6, but not out of the woods, as he had to face GM-elect Max Illingworth with the black pieces. I expected Short to play hard for the win, as a number of players could potentially reach 6 points, but he adopted a fairly cramped Philidory/Steinitzy kind of structure that didn't seem to promise all that much. In the middlegame Short seemed to be slowly untangling and threatening to get a bit of an edge, but in the end Illingworth showed his strength by keeping it all under control and Nigel extended him respect by agreeing a draw in an equal ending, despite the rating difference. That made 6 points the target for equal first, with Max a trifle unlucky to get stranded on 5.5.

On Board 2 Brodie McClymont and Zong-Yuan Zhao could both get to 6 with a win, with the GM playing Black. Fans were happy to see an exciting theoretical struggle in a Marshall Gambit, with Zhao carrying his initiative for the pawn all the way

into an ending. Brodie was the one pushing for a win in the final phase though, but Zong-Yuan kept his cool and drew the pawn down ending, consigning both of them to 5.5.

On Board 3 Izzat and Solomon were also both shooting for a share of first, so it was no surprise when the ultra-sharp Noteboom Variation of the Semi Slav appeared on the board. Solomon seemed to know exactly what he was doing and after about 20 moves had established a small advantage in a very strategically complex position. However, a couple of inaccurate moves quickly reversed that and it was Black who was looking a trifle uncomfortable. Solo hung in there though and reached a position where on move 30 a queen retreat to d8 would have left him roughly equal. Instead he made a serious error, moving his queen to e6, after which a tactical point meant that things went rapidly downhill. In a lost position Stephen made a practical decision to jettison his queen for rook and bishop, but despite not finding the quickest way, Kanan was able to keep things under control sufficiently to earn the win and a well-deserved share of the top loot.

Izzat, Kanan 2491

Solomon, Stephen 2361

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 c6 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.a4 Bb4 6.e3 b5 7.Bd2 a5 8.axb5 Bxc3 9.Bxc3 cxb5 10.b3 Bb7 11.bxc4 b4 12.Bb2 Nf6 13.Bd3 Nbd7 14.O-O O-O 15.Nd2 Re8 16.Qc2 e5 17.f3 h6 18.Rfd1 Qc7 19.Nf1 e4 20.Be2 Nb6 21.Qb3 Qe7 22.d5 Nbd7 23.Bd4 Nc5 24.Qb2 Ra6 25.Ng3 Bc8 26.fxe4 Nfxe4 27.Nxe4 Nxe4 28.c5 Rg6 29.Bh5 Rg5 30.d6 Qe6 31.Bf3 Bd7 32.Rxa5 Nxd6 33.Ra6 Qf5 34.Rf1 Ne4 35.Bh5

**Qxf1+ 36.Kxf1 Rxh5 37.c6 Bc8
38.Rb6 Rxh2 39.Kg1 Rh5 40.Qxb4
Rg5 41.Rb8 Kh7 42.c7 h5 43.Qb1 f5
44.Qb5 Rf8 45.Qe5 h4 46.Kh2 Nf6
47.Qe7 Ng4+ 48.Kg1**

1 - 0

The other two first place contenders were Bobby Cheng and Erik Teichmann on Board 4, with Cheng championing the white pieces. Teichmann essayed his favourite Tchigorin Defence against the Queen's Gambit and seemed to achieve a roughly equal position. However, Cheng then commenced some very powerful positional chess, eventually launching a successful minority attack. Having conquered the queenside his pieces finally overran the kingside as well for a fine win and a share of first with Short and Izzat. Nevertheless, a promising return by the Teich, who is soon heading off to play the Spanish circuit.

No other players could reach 6/7, but the Board 5 game was quite interesting, with Levi Black against Ikeda. Levi equalised in a Reversed Benoni but deployed a bishop prematurely instead of castling and Ikeda got an edge. Levi found plenty of tricks and fought it down to an

ending where only Ikeda's bishop pair gave him the advantage. This suddenly escalated when a Levi bishop was almost trapped in the open board, forcing him to give up a pawn. Despite being a pawn down and still facing the bishop pair, Levi was able to exploit some inaccurate play by Ikeda to actually get full compensation for the pawn and with 37...Ne6 or 39...Ne6 he could have easily held the draw. Alas for Eddy, after a few mutual errors Junta regained a big advantage and eventually won.

On Board 6 Sandler achieved a small advantage with white against the Bogo Indian of Wallis, but stuffed it up and ended up sacking a pawn for insufficient compensation. He was soon forced to sac the exchange to justify it and should have reached an ending with a pawn for the exchange, probably lost but requiring good technique. Instead he avoided the queen swap and found himself in a deadly pin that could never be broken. Wallis thus joined the group on 5.5.

The only other person to get to 5.5 was IM Rujevic, who beat fellow veteran Brian Jones with Black on Board 7.

Thus the strongest Ballarat Open ever came to an end. Jean and I had to get going, so we missed the prizegiving as is the loser's prerogative, but I noticed when writing this that only 2 of the top 8 scorers were aged over 40 and one of those was Nigel Short! The generational shift in Australian chess is certainly complete. Congratulations to Kanan Izzat on his second win in a row. If he ends up playing for Australia it will be a great acquisition.

Unfortunately Jean lost a keyring with keys to both our cars and the house somewhere in Ballarat and we never got it back. So if someone finds those keys, a reward awaits! Well done to Patrick Cook, Kevin Perrin and their team on organising a superb event and also to the arbiting panel headed by Gary Bekker and Jamie Kenmure. I especially enjoyed the wonderful commentary by Ian Rogers, whose enthusiasm for chess never seems to tire. Nothing is better for the soul after a demoralising loss than heading over to the live commentary to watch someone else's train wreck as it occurs.



Left:

GM Darryl Johansen
on the right still
playing solid chess

Right:

Nigel Short against
Australian's newest
grandmaster, Max
Illingworth



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