

A memorable night out in Bath

In the absence of our star A team players, Henry and Mike M, we still arrived at Bath with eight division one players and three extras (one reserve, one dad and one photographer) which turned out to be six more than the home team by 7:30. Until about twenty to eight, that is, when a couple of Bath latecomers joined the fun. But at 8 o'clock, rather than default, their intended board seven had to be replaced by one of the available club members, William Waldron, a relatively inexperienced player.

Not a lot had happened by then, although I thought Martin had more than equalised against Rob, judging by the fact that White's King was on stuck on f1, his QB was seemingly restricted by pawns of the same colour and he had already used about twenty minutes more. Little did I know how crucial this game would turn out to be at the end.

Board four looked like it was going to be a real slugfest between two super-heavyweights. By the way, what is the collective noun for draw specialists? An Andrew?

Oli was just getting started and all the other boards were pretty level when I went to check the bar prices and, by the time I returned, Jerry had a promising position against Arda and soon won a pawn while Oli also had a big plus and won a piece with a strong attack to boot. But guess what? Board four had ended in a draw. The other boards were still in the early skirmishing stages with no reason to think that anyone was getting too much of an advantage.

Oli soon converted his win against William and Jerry's pressure also led to early resignation, it looked possibly a little premature but Arda's position was definitely not one to be fancied. Rich had evidently prepared something special for David. His Queen-side pawns had advanced to provide more space and he definitely had a small edge. Steve against Roy, Nigel against Adam and Mike against Horia were too close to call. And Rob had untangled his rooks and built pressure down the c file which partly made up for his hemmed in bishop but by now he had used half an hour more than Martin.

With two and a half points in the bag and nobody under threat of losing, this looked like we could be coasting to victory. Never assume! If you do, something will always confound you.

The two most difficult games to assess were Steve's and Nigel's. Steve's was blocked, while Nigel's was wild. It would all depend on who saw more on the night. While they were battling, Mike was building a very promising attack against Horia and meanwhile Rich reached an ending with slightly better piece play but less time. He wisely decided to neutralise Bath's top player of many years by contriving an opposite coloured bishops ending which was promptly agreed drawn.

3-1 up now. And then boards two and three were also shared. But no draws here - Nigel forced a central pawn up the open board and when it reached the seventh, Adam was faced with being a piece down in a hopeless situation. But Steve's game, level in a fairly blocked position for so many moves, finally deteriorated against Roy's clever manoeuvring of his minor pieces. 4-2 up now!

With just half a point more needed, surely we would cross the line but of course if not, we would lose on board count. Mike's attack was fraught. Horia uncorked one miraculous defensive move which kept him alive - just. The follow up became very difficult and

suddenly, instead of calling all the shots, Mike had to plan to hold a tricky minor piece ending. Suffice it to say, it went wrong and we were left with Martin v Rob with ten minutes remaining.

Martin seized the moment to teach us all new nail biting techniques. He was the exchange up in a mainly static position and he had eight or nine minutes against 38 seconds with a reasonably obvious sequence of rook moves to attack the enemy Queen. A minute or two passed while he analysed. Then another minute or two. Then two more. Just look at Rich's face in the photo! He finally got it down to equal seconds before deciding to advance his rook down the board where Rob promptly cut it off with his bishop.

Martin opted to give the exchange back to reach a safe-ish ending where he could survive numerous checks, albeit while going down to two or three seconds before regaining them on the increment and eventually forcing perpetual check himself to bring home the trophy by the narrowest of margins. Please, Martin, don't put us through all that again any time soon!

So, while Bath had once again had shown what fighters they are, we had successfully defended the KO cup. Well done, both teams on an excellent struggle. Oh, and you can see whether you agree with any of the above comments by checking the games section, kindly provided by Dave.

Ian Pickup