

Round 6 Rugeley vs Crowthorne

For the last four weeks the league table has looked the same at the top. Just to jog your memory or if this is your first time reading the report, here is the league table from the last round.

Group C

			rd 1	rd 2	rd 3	rd 4	rd 5	P	W	D	L	MP	GP
1	Manchester Manticores 2	man2	cro1 3	warb 3½	rgl 1½	hw3 3½	wok 4	5	4	0	1	8	15½
2	Crowthorne 1	cro1	man2 1	hw3 3½	wok 4	4ge 4	sa2 2½	5	4	0	1	8	15
3	Rugeley Rangers	rgl	warb 4	4ge 1½	man2 2½	sa2 3	hw3 3	5	4	0	1	8	14
4	4 Gems	4ge	wok 2	rgl 2½	sa2 3½	cro1 0	warb 1	5	2	1	2	5	9
5	Warwickshire Bears B	warb	rgl 0	man2 ½	hw3 2½	wok 2	4ge 3	5	2	1	2	5	8
6	St Albans 2	sa2	hw3 2½	wok 4	4ge ½	rgl 1	cro1 1½	5	2	0	3	4	9½
7	Woking Warriors	wok	4ge 2	sa2 0	cro1 -½	warb 2	man2 0	5	0	2	3	2	3½
8	Harrow 3	hw3	sa2 1½	cro1 ½	warb 1½	man2 ½	rgl 1	5	0	0	5	0	5

Throughout the league Crowthorne and Manchester have been ahead of Rugeley by the slimmest of game points. Tonight, one way or another that is going to change.

The only loss Crowthorne have had in this competition is to the team in 1st place, Manchester (who we beat 2½-1½). If Crowthorne want to win group C they must get past Rugeley, the other strongest contender in the group.

I was expecting the best players they had and surprisingly my prediction came true!!!!

		Rugeley Rangers	1624		Crowthorne 1	1930
491	w	Whatmore, Steve (SteveWhatmore)	1810 c	-	Duckers, Harvey L (HarveyDuckers)	2065
492	b	Carr, Matthew (mattcarr2600)	1688	-	Johnson, Derek R (nobodyIknow)	2020
493	w	Sullivan, Luke (death2rooks93)	1571 c	-	Taylor, Mark V (voklorok)	1841
494	b	Wood, Ryan (RyanWood01)	1428 c	-	Green, George D A (CrowthorneGG)	1797

This is going to be one for the record books if nothing else.

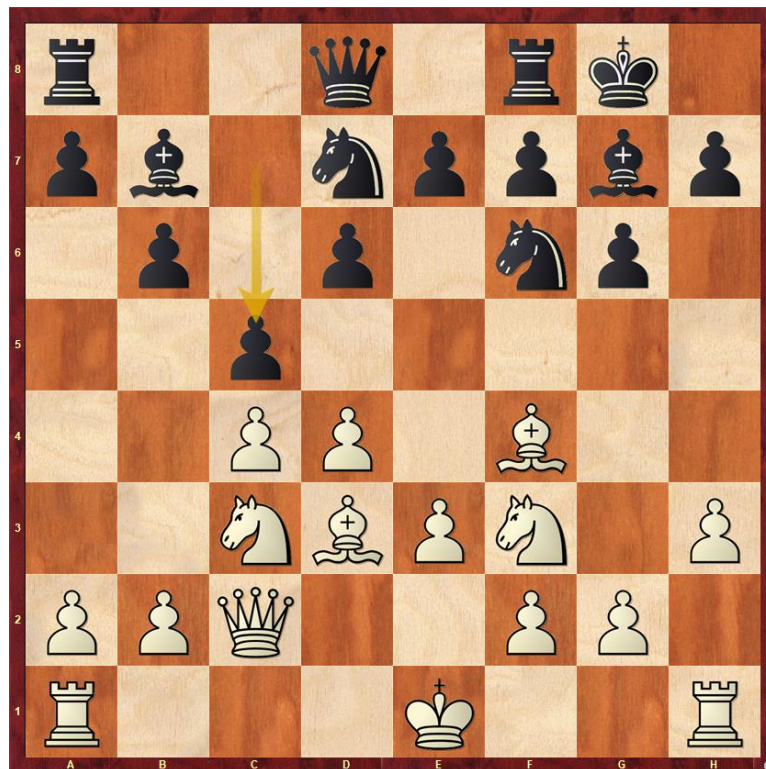
The Rugeley team was pumped and after the opening remarks from the captain the games were on. One more prediction: Whoever wins this wins the group.

Luke was the first game to finish. The game opened with what my silicon friend is calling the A04 Zukertort Opening: Queenside Fianchetto Variation. Luke opened with the kingside knight starting off as a Reti, developed pawns in the centre making his opening more of a queen's gambit, with the bishop developed to f4 and a pawn on e3 like a London System.

His opponent Mark, fianchettoed both his bishops, pushed the d6 pawn and developed the knight to hit the centre. Last time I saw something like that style was a hippo opening. Black develops the pieces quietly and then when the moment is right you strike and strike hard.

My silicon friend also informs me this kind of opening setup was last done by such names as Maxime Vachier Lagrave, Sergey Karjakin and someone called Magnus Carlsen. Anyone heard of him?

Mark was waiting to strike against Luke and on move 9 he did.



This move 9.c5 was given an ?? by the computer, claiming e5 was better. It hands Luke a small edge but keeping it is another matter. Apparently right idea to strike out but wrong pawn, e5 was the move.

Luke in response pushed d5, ignoring the push and locking Marks white squared bishop out of the game... for now.

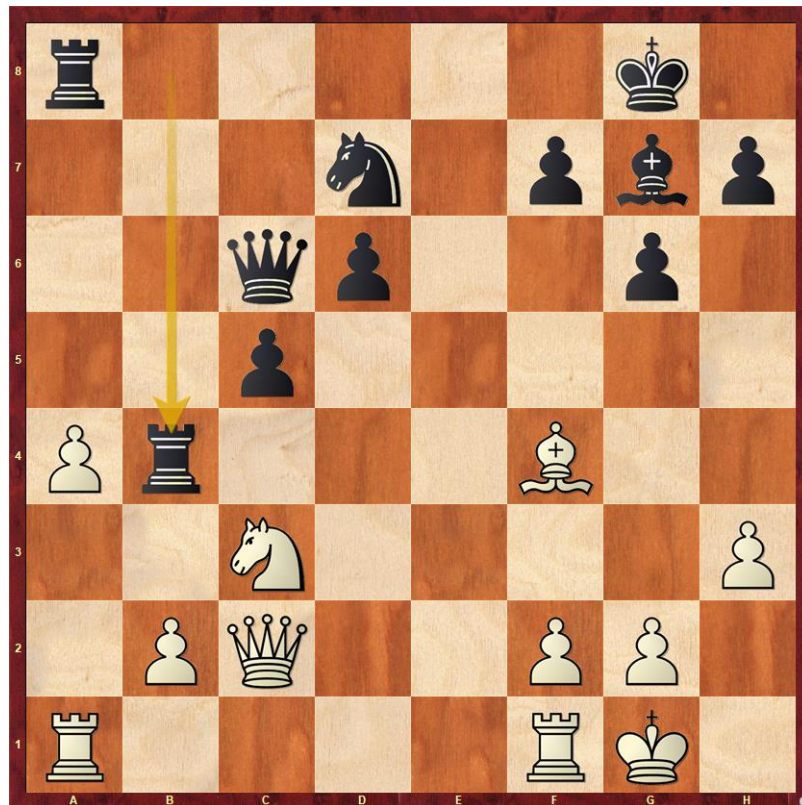
Mark began a queenside push with the pawns to try and liberate his bishop. Luke castled kingside to get out of the way of what's coming.

Mass exchanges with pawns and pieces were on the cards. Mark pushed on the queenside taking the pawns to weaken Lukes centre. When the dust settled Luke has his bishop and a passed pawn on the queenside, Mark had some control of the centre and that locked in bishop was pointing towards Lukes king.

Luke was having the time of his life, enjoying the tension in the centre and thinking up what sort of anarchy to cause his opponent in the middlegame. As Mark was getting his pieces into position to

come through the centre. Luke started blocking it up with the pawns. Can't checkmate your opponent if their pieces are in the way, something had to be done. Remember that bishop which was so nicely liberated, Mark came back to offer its exchange. Luke accepted and that's one attacker gone from the board but now Lukes queenside was getting weaker with his bishops' disappearance.

Both players started to rearrange their pieces now. Mark bringing his rooks over to the queenside, Luke bringing pieces towards the centre, everything looking nice until:



Mark started to bring in the heavy artillery. Luke retreated the bishop to e3, getting it out of the line of the rook but this opens up a new problem. Mark pushed d5 and if Luke is not careful the bishop and knight get forked.

Luke retreated the bishop once more to defend the knight and Mark took the chance to double the rooks on the b file.

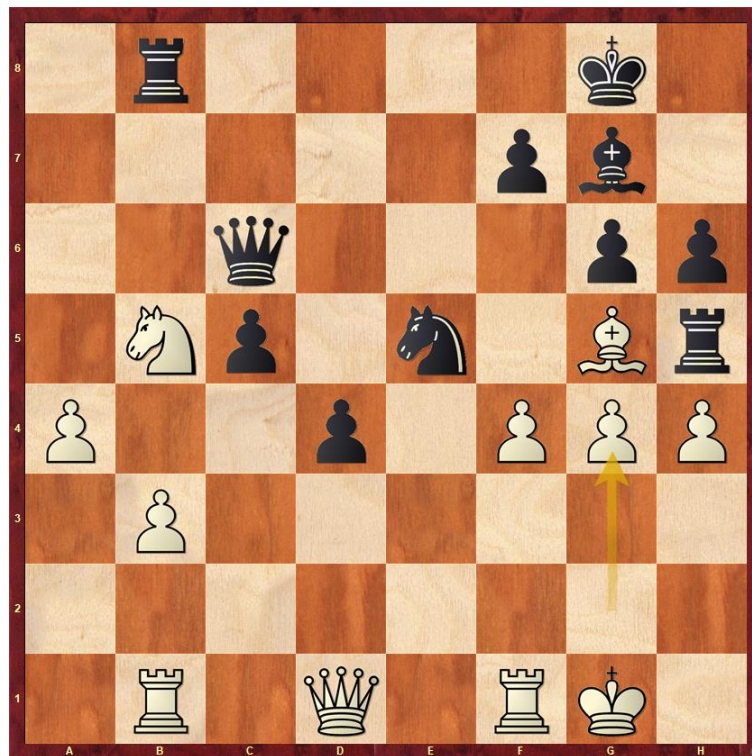
Mark tried attacking the pawns hard but they were just too well defended. Then he saw an idea. The queen was pointing at the queenside and the rook was in prime position. Mark swung the b4 rook over to the kingside and started to put pressure on Luke.

Luke was having none of it, so when the Rook came to h4, he was ready with Bg5 threatening it, when the rook came back one to threaten the bishop, Luke played h4 and trapped the rook. The rook was out of the game... for the moment.

Mark had to act quickly otherwise the g4 pawn is coming forward and threatening to win the exchange. Mark played Ne5, holding off g4.

When you cannot push something, prepare it, so back comes the queen. Mark took the chance to push his d pawn one forward, now the pawns are about to rock and roll forward.

Luke pushed f4 to first move the knight, in reply Mark pushed h6, to threaten the bishop. Luke ignored that threat and played the move he has been hoping for 3 moves ago. G4. So much is now ready for the taking.



What is going on here! 🤖

Mark decided to get the Bishop off the board, hxg5 was played and Luke captured the rook. Mark then played a move which sent the computer engine crazy, g4. Trying to get more pieces around Lukes king but missing that the knight was under attack so Luke relieved Mark of it. After bishop takes it back and Luke picked up the pawn on g4 Luke was a whole rook up with an attack on Mark's king. Mark resigned.

A well fought game by both players, the tension was there throughout. But Rugeley lead the charge to being group champions now.

Rugeley Rangers 1 – 0 Crowthorne

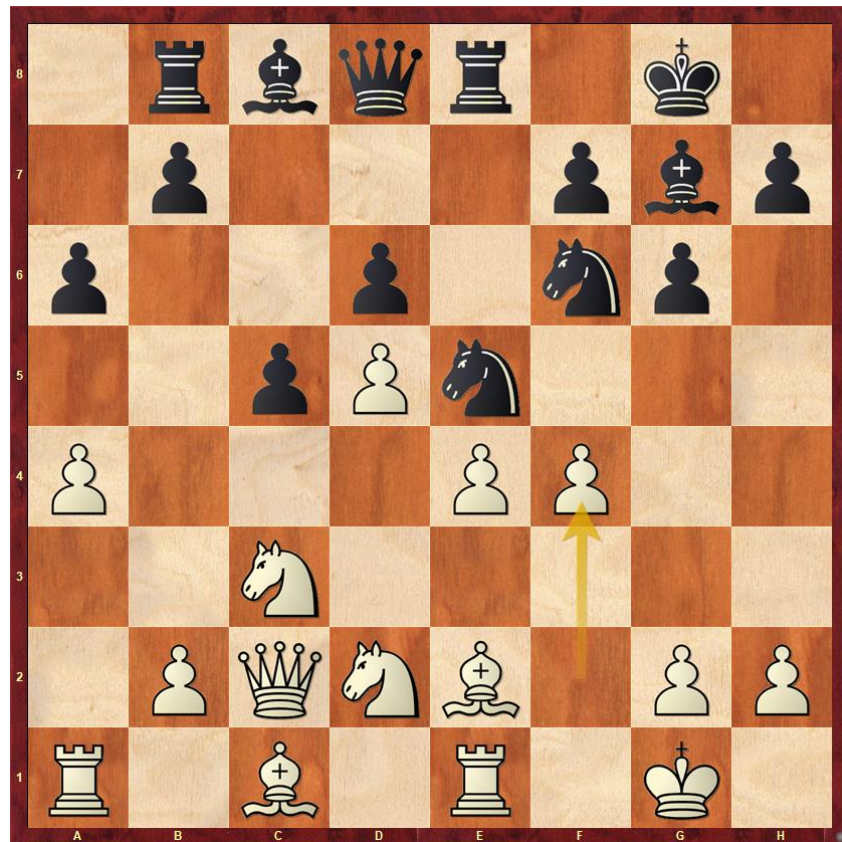
Steve was the second game to finish.

Steve's game started out as a Benoni Defence: Classical Variation. Steve opened with the queen's pawn and Harvey answered with the knight on f6 and as his second move pushed c5, to make strides in the centre that way. Steve pushed past it and developed the two knights and defended the centre with his e pawn.

Harvey started to develop his own pieces, fianchettoing his bishop on the kingside, developing the knights and castling as Steve readied his pieces.

Harvey already had a slight edge on the queenside and the formation of the pawns looked like that was where he wanted the fun to happen. Steve had other ideas and prepared his forces for an attack through the centre.

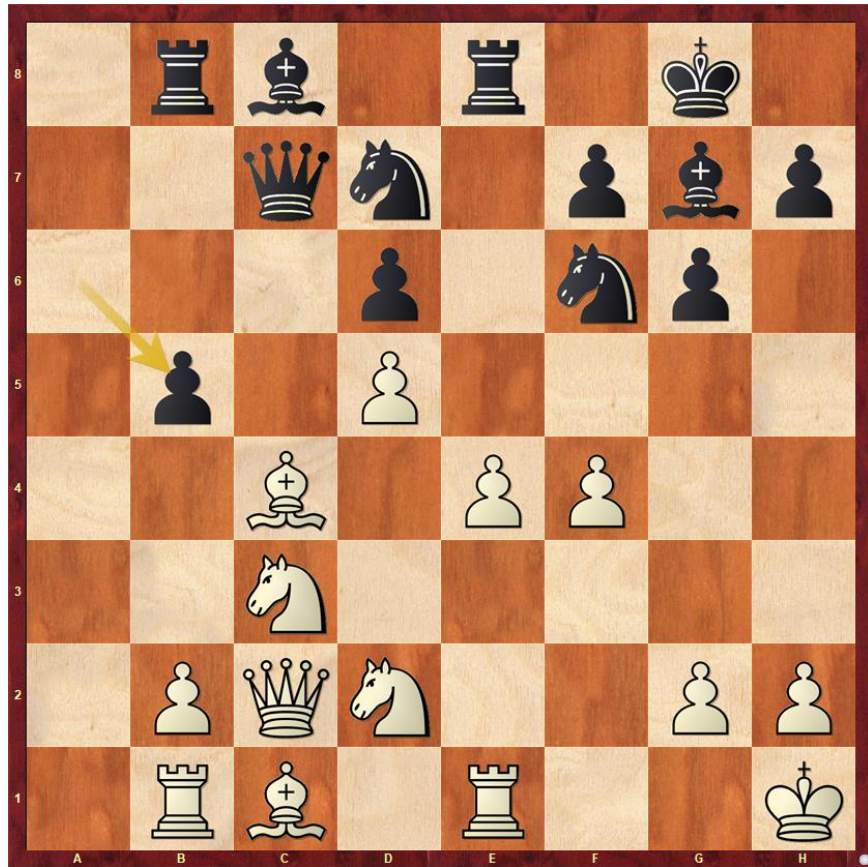
Makes sense really an attack on the wings must be countered with an attack on the centre. When Harvey tried to hold it off by bringing a knight into the centre. Steve struck.



Up comes a pawn to wrestle control of the centre.

The knight retreated to e7 and both sides continued to build up the pressure ready for another big push. Steve moved his rook to back up the b-pawn and moved his king to the corner, Harvey moved his queen to c7 and started his push with c4. Which looks off to me. Defended only by the queen and attacked by a knight and bishop, im thinking what's the game? Steve did not hesitate and took it, accepting the sacrifice.

Harvey offered him another one, b5. After the a pawns take each other off, now the point of it becomes clear.

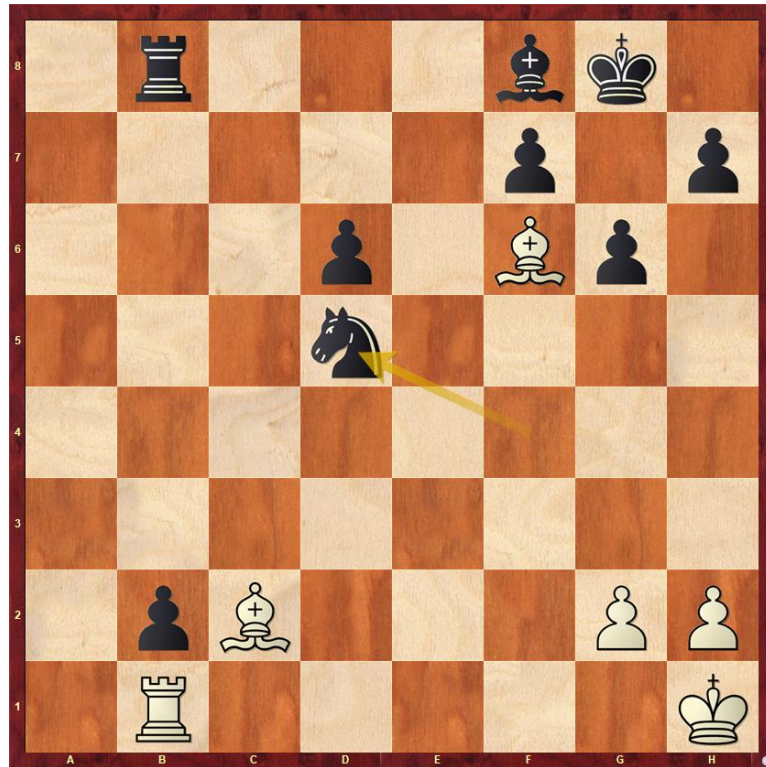


Steve can't capture the b pawn because while he has the attacking advantage the knight is pinned. If the bishop or knight takes, the rook takes and it can't capture back because Steve loses his queen. Evil, beautiful, but evil. So Steve retreated the bishop to b3, the idea being if the pawn moves forward again the knight isn't pinned to the queen, it can move and the queen can't be captured for nothing.

That is exactly what happened and as a result Steve had material equality but the pieces were uncoordinated and stuck on the starting rank.

Steve started to move the pieces so they would start working together again and achieved this pretty quickly, trouble is Harvey was moving his pieces at the same time.

His pieces started to come into the position and put pressure on the queenside, the rook forced to stay over there in order to guard against an advancing b pawn. As the rook had to hold off incoming pawn Harvey used that to his advantage and started ripping the pawns off the board.



Here Steve chose to take the b pawn off with the rook. Harvey did not capture back, instead moving the Rook to e8 threatening a checkmate.

Steve played d4 to hold it off and Harvey replied with Bg7. Now the bishop on d4 is overloaded. It can't stay where it is otherwise it will be taken, it can't take the bishop on g7 because of checkmate and it can't move out of the way otherwise the rook comes off the board.

Here understandably, Steve resigned.

A hard-fought game that and that makes the score level again.

Rugeley Rangers 1 – 1 Crowthorne

Matt was the third game to finish. We had a French defence, it started off as a Winawer variation and then quickly changed into a Delayed Exchange Variation. Instead of pushing past the d pawn like you supposed to, Derek took the d pawn allowing Matt the advantage of his bishop into the game but also doing the one thing that gets you the edge against Matt. Took the game into an area he was not sure of.

Both players started developing their pieces, Matt planning a wait and see approach, Derek launching his pieces at Matt's kingside and try and smash it open. When both sides had castled and Matt had his defences ready, the attack came.



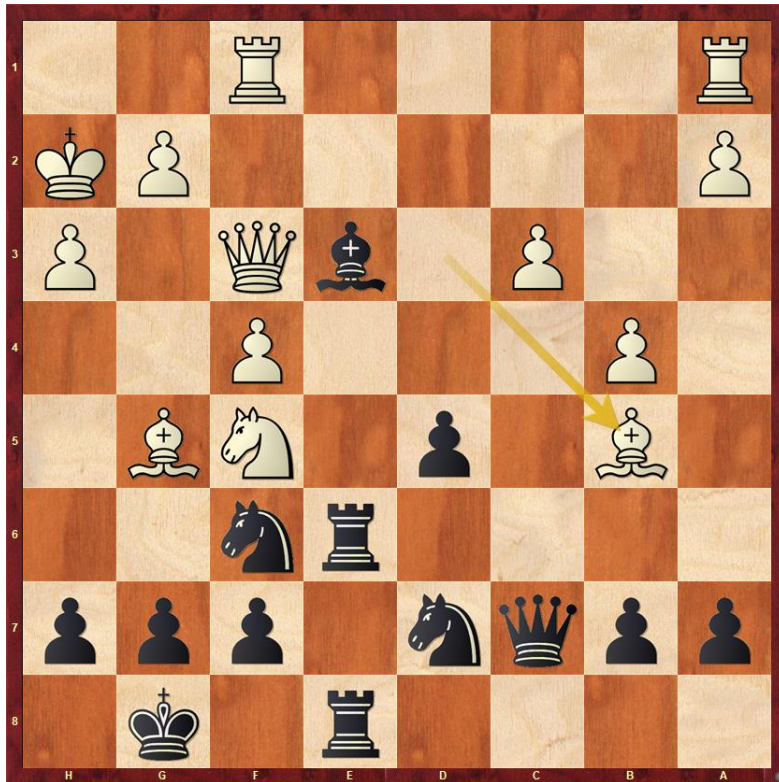
Here Derek was hoping to launch an attack on the kingside with a pawn to create weaknesses and potentially trap the bishop. Matt was not going to fall for that and moved the bishop to g4 getting it out of trouble for now. Derek really wanted that bishop gone as next move he played h3 and Matt removed the knight on e2. The queen recaptured and Matt got the open file with his rook when he threatened it.

Derek moved the queen out of the way into the kingside. Matt pushed his to the queenside threatening the pawns on d4 and b2.

Derek defended them with c3 and matt finally got his French defence pawn break in, c5. Derek took it and Matt captured back with the bishop, calling check on the king. It moved to h2 to better hide from the attack and Matt moved his rook down to hit the queen and bishop. The queen was forced to retreat where she started from, it was the only square to save the bishop. Now Matt was smiling but had no idea how to drive home his attack, was it over?

He thought so for now, so doubled the rooks on the e file and Derek took the chance to develop the knight to f5 hitting the rook. Matt pulled it back to e6 to protect the knight. Derek pushed his b pawn up to threaten the bishop and Matt moved it to e3 threatening the pawn, lightly but it was the only thing between Matt's pieces and Derek's king.

Matt built up the pressure on it over the next few move when he moved the queen back to hit it and the lone c pawn. Now Derek switched tactics.



He moved his bishop to b5 trying to take away the defenders. Matt had the option to try kicking the knight or bishop on the kingside but instead not wanting to move the defenders in front of his king, they were doing a good job there, Matt took the free pawn. Qxc3??

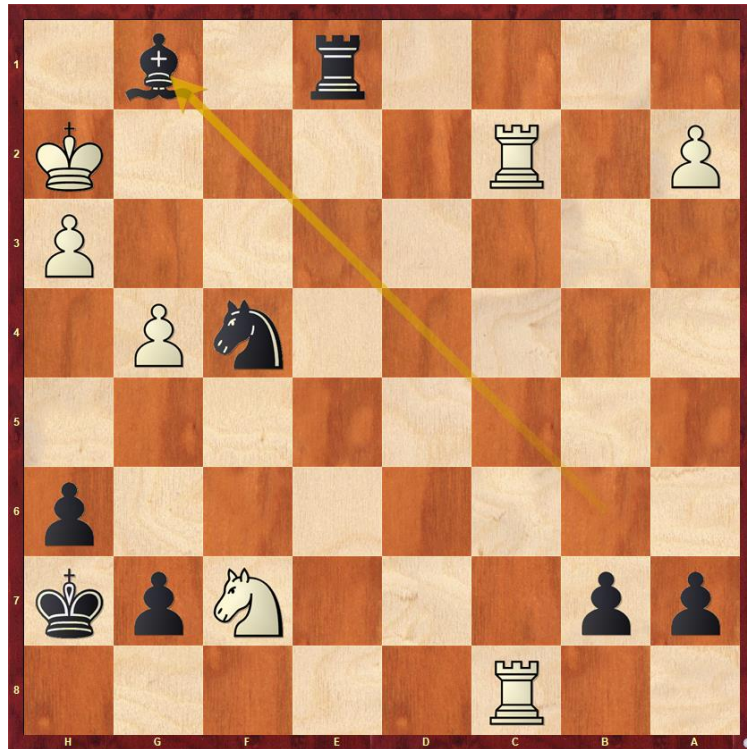
Apparently g6 would have been the best move.

Derek pounced on his advantage. Bxf6 and Matt decides to give up the exchange, Nxf6. Derek grabs the rook on e8 and matt picks up the bishop with his last remaining one. Derek then moves the rook on a1 to defend the pawn so Matt cannot keep the material level by grabbing another pawn.

Matt thinking his central pawn is his new edge offers the exchange of queens which Derek accepts, and Matt prepares to push it. Derek has other ideas, within a few moves the rooks are lining up against the bishop and pawn and soon there is no way to save them.

Matt grabs the pawn and starts concocting a dastardly plan. He knows he has the material disadvantage but Derek's king is a little exposed. So, he starts lining up for a little idea of his own. If he can get the bishop, knight and rook around Derek's king there might be a chance.

So as Derek starts taking Matt's pawns the knight and rook comes in, finally the piece that will kickstart this idea flies into the position.



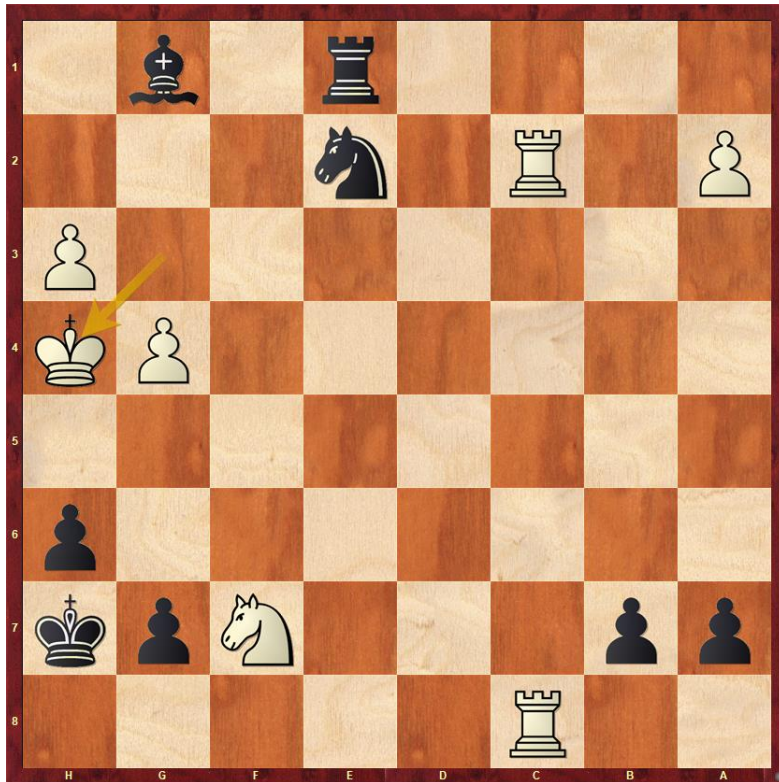
The King has to move so came to g3, Matt hits it again with Ne2 and suddenly Derek finds himself in trouble, the king can't escape the checks, not without giving material back.

The king can't go to f3 as that runs into Nd4+, picks up the rook and Matt enters the endgame a pawn up.

He can't go to h4 as that walks into a mate in 2, so Derek has to move the king back where it came from and the position is repeated. Matt claims the draw when Derek doesn't want to go down the other two lines and we have a forced draw. A very tough game there, Matt under pressure throughout. Well fought both of you.

Rugeley Rangers 1½ - 1½ Crowthorne

Incidentally, I said at the end there was a mate in 2. See if you can find it? Black to play.

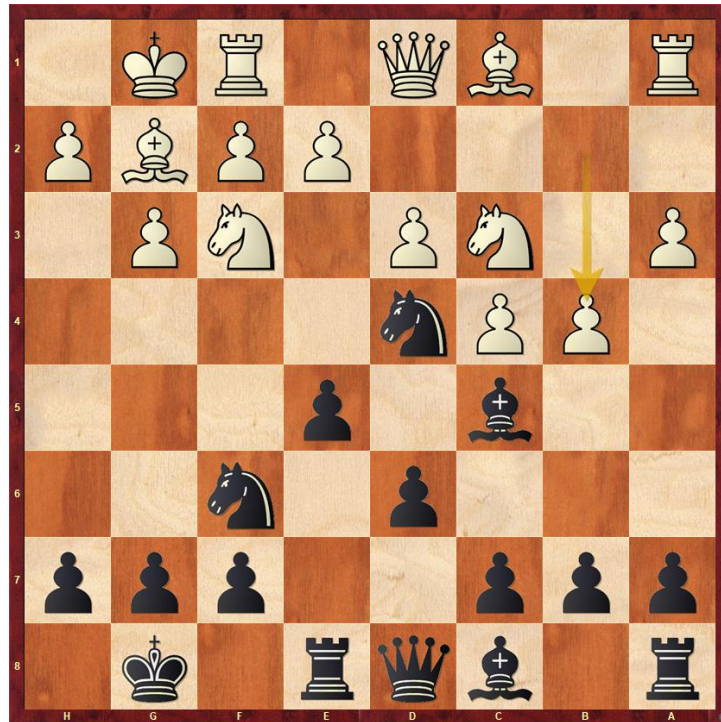


Ryan was the final game to finish, everyone was looking at it, including the team captain from one of the other teams vying for 1st place. Manchester Manticores.

Ryan had to face an English opening. A very versatile opening that gives white good middlegame chances. The official name for it is English Opening: King's English Variation, Four Knights Variation, Fianchetto Line.

What a name!

Both players developed their pieces, Ryan directly took control of the centre with his pieces, so George decided to make their existence on their tough. He pushed his pawns on the queenside to try to dislodge them.



Ryan took the knight on f3 calling check. When the bishop recaptured the bishop advanced to d4 hitting the knight on c3 and pinning it thanks to the rook on a1.

George played Bb2 breaking the pin and Ryan advanced c6. When the inevitable pawn push on e3 came, Ryan took the knight off and the game becomes Georges two bishop's vs Ryan's bishop and knight. As a rule, bishops are better than knights but that all depends how the game and position go. Personally, give me a knight and bishop vs 2 bishops any day but that's this writers opinion.

Back to the game, Ryan pushed d5 grabbing hold of the centre. George retreats his bishop back to g2 and Ryan uses his d pawn to remove the c4 pawn. When George takes back with his, the two queens face each other. Will we have a queen swap?

Not yet. Ryan moved his bishop to e6 hitting the defenceless pawn on c4.

George moves his queen to e2, defending said pawn and Ryan switches tactics. He played his queen to c7 getting ready to face the rooks that are coming.

Both players next move was to play rooks to the open d file and now we have a standoff.



George played his bishop back to b2, I think waiting to see what his opponent would do in this situation.

Ryan began the process of doubling the rooks with Re7. George could not let that happen so took the rook on d8. When queen takes, Georges other rook tries to take the file but Ryan plays Rd7 and all the rooks come off.

Now George tries to find a way into Ryan's position but through a few small pawn pushes and Ryan's king coming into the defence of the bishop and Queen George cant break through. Again, he adopts a wait and see approach for how Ryan wants to pursue the game.

Ryan begins pushing his pawns on the kingside forward slowly and cautiously, always defended by something, never letting George get a chance to strike with his pieces, so he used the kingside pawns instead.



Here mass exchanges took place. The pawns on the e and f file came off along with the white squared bishop, which would be in Ryan's favour in this case as all his pawns bar one is sitting on white squares which the bishop cant get at. So, George took the knight off and after Ryan took it off with the queen, George brought the queen down to d7 calling a check. Ryan had to block it with his otherwise George goes a pawn up.

Now the queens come off and the kings start a race towards the centre. Both players were in time trouble heading into this ending and the pawns got locked together. With no way for the kings to get past one another and no pawn willing or able to move the game was a draw.

Final score

Rugeley Rangers 2 – 2 Crowthorne.

What a match, I think that is the strongest line up we have had to face in the league and it was the team this captain was most dreading having to face. I knew it was always going to be a tough battle and I was not disappointed.

Only question remains what happened to the other team that was tied for first place?

Manchester Manticores won their game 3½ - 1½.

Group C

			rd 1	rd 2	rd 3	rd 4	rd 5	rd 6	P	W	D	L	MP	GP
1	Manchester Manticores 2	man2	cro1 3	warb 3½	rgl 1½	hw3 3½	wok 4	4ge 3½	6	5	0	1	10	19
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3	Rugeley Rangers	rgl	warb 4	4ge 1½	man2 2½	sa2 3	hw3 3	cro1 2	6	4	1	1	9	16
4	Warwickshire Bears B	warb	rgl 0	man2 ½	hw3 2½	wok 2	4ge 3	sa2 3	6	3	1	2	7	11
5	4 Gems	4ge	wok 2	rgl 2½	sa2 3½	cro1 0	warb 1	man2 ½	6	2	1	3	5	9½
6	St Albans 2	sa2	hw3 2½	wok 4	4ge ½	rgl 1	cro1 1½	warb 1	6	2	0	4	4	10½
7	Harrow 3	hw3	sa2 1½	cro1 ½	warb 1½	man2 ½	rgl 1	wok 3	6	1	0	5	2	8
8	Woking Warriors	wok	4ge 2	sa2 0	cro1 -½	warb 2	man2 0	hw3 1	6	0	2	4	2	4½

There may yet still be a chance for Rugeley to win the league but we need Manchester to lose or draw their final round game and we need at least one more game point than Crowthorne. I have seen it happen before but will we see it happen again?

Find out in the round 7 when Rugeley take on Woking Warriors.

The games can be found at the following URL's if you want to have a look at the games.

Steve: <https://lichess.org/X891QqiO>

Matt: <https://lichess.org/JOMg9U0y/black>

Luke: <https://lichess.org/XHCPzYGN>

Ryan: <https://lichess.org/wOLhLiU0/black>

Puzzle answer:

Bf2+, Kh5, g6#