

Wigston 2 vs Rugeley Rangers

Round 7 and most likely the final round of Season 2 of 4NCL Online sees the Rugeley Rangers facing a team called Wigston. The draw comes up both teams are in for this:

		Wigston 2	1639		Rugeley Rangers	1611
431	w	Kruitbosch, Gijs (<i>gmedway</i>)	1840 c	-	Whatmore, Steve (<i>SteveWhatmore</i>)	1825 c
432	b	Pike, Andrew (<i>deckard4real</i>)	1645 c	-	Carr, Matthew (<i>mattcarr2600</i>)	1705 e
433	w	Mottram, Paul (<i>PJMchess</i>)	1592 e	-	Sullivan, Luke (<i>death2rooks93</i>)	1525 c
434	b	Collins, RF (Bob) (<i>bc199</i>)	1480 c	-	Wood, Ryan (<i>RyanWood01</i>)	1390 c
				- - -		

This is interesting. The pairings show that the team is on average stronger than us, however looking at the Lichess ratings we see a slightly different story.

Gijs – 1269 Steve - 1865

Andrew – 1625 Matt - 1715

Paul – 1502 Luke - 1708

Bob – 1705 Ryan - 1750

One set of pairings say Wigston should win this, another says Rugeley should take it. Let's find out how the final round goes for Rugeley Rangers

Luke was the first to finish. My silicon friend informs me that we had an E61 King's Indian Defence. Well that's how Paul opened the game anyway. Luke has this tendency to go in for the black lion setup with his pawns if he gets the chance, for those that don't know this is where the player with black launches a full-on attack on the kingside and locks the queenside up to make sure they can bring as many pieces or as much firepower down the kingside as possible. That was certainly the setup Luke adopted:



Paul may have the centre but it's not going anywhere in a hurry. Luke got a knight to a good outpost and now the fireworks start.

H5 was played. This my computer immediately gave ?? to. It allowed Nxc5 seemingly winning a pawn for nothing. Luke carried on with his plan hxg4 and after the pawn captures back the rooks on the h file came off, leaving Paul with the open h file with no contestation. Then came a small problem for Luke cxd5 was played and that was apparently a mouse slip. Luke asked for a takeback but it was rejected, not surprising in competitive chess, it's not allowed in over the board so I wouldn't expect it here. Another of the misfortunes, or dangers of online chess. But the show must go on and Luke decided it was time to go all out, caution was thrown to whatever passes for the wind online. 19. Cxd5 and this allows Luke to go in for a check with that knight on b4. Knight can't take it back as its pinned to the king! So, the knights and queens come off in the resulting exchange. It leaves Luke not recovered, but better than he was.



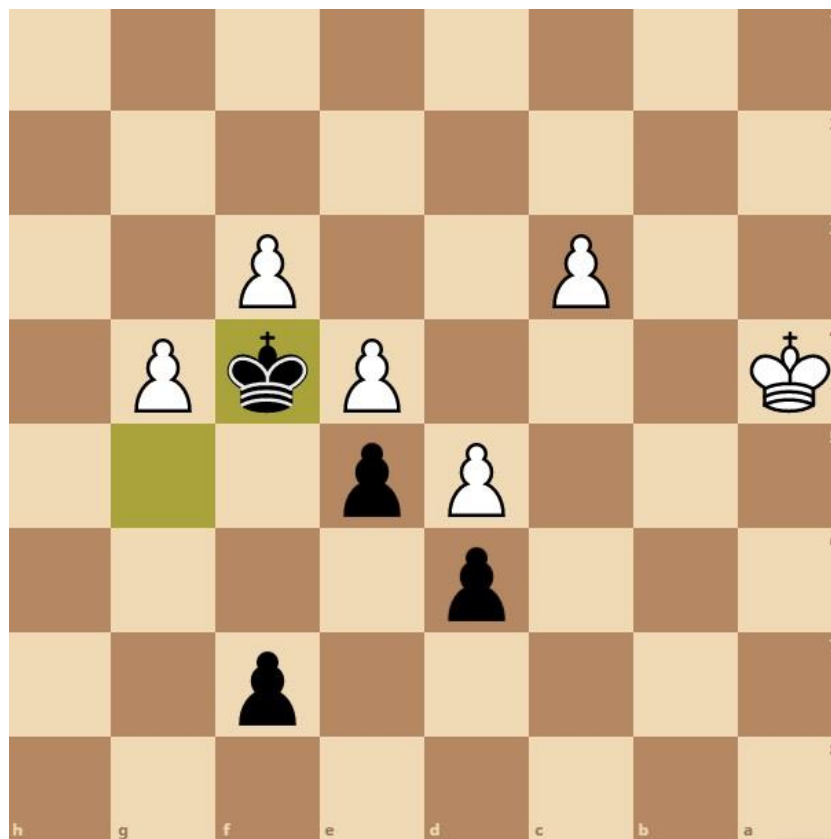
Long way to go yet.

Paul takes advantage of the open h-file and brings the rook down for check, forcing the knight to block, the alternative is the rook on a8 being taken. The rook having moved the knight goes to h7, couldn't go there previously but now it can. Luke has only one way to stop the now double attack on f7 and so he takes the knight on g5, after bishop recaptures Luke grabs the pawn on a4. Now Paul should be careful, yes, he has an attack on Luke's king but now that a pawn of Luke's has nothing stopping it going forward and its backed up by a rook. Things are starting to look up.

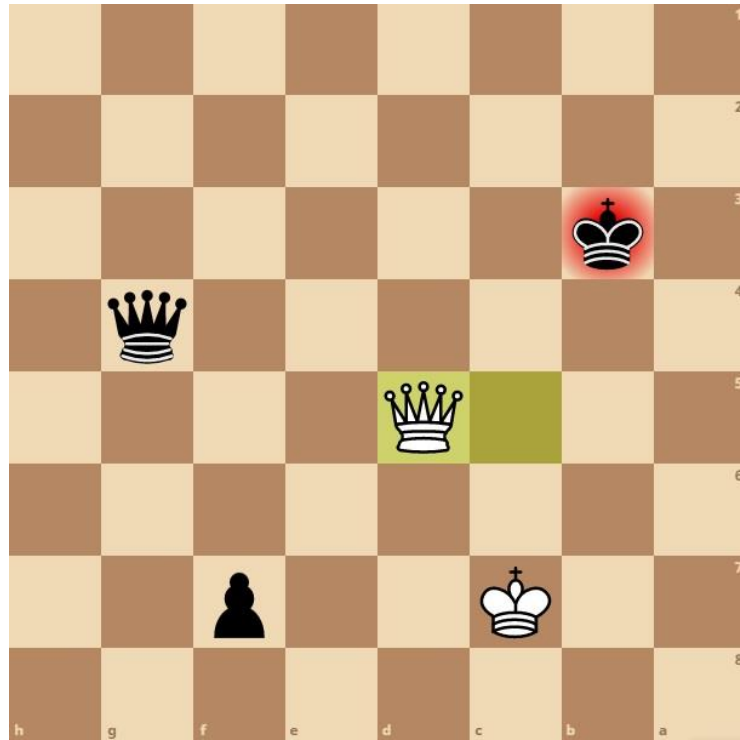
After a few moves and two rejected draw offers later (One from Luke and one from Paul the pawns are running. Paul having exchanged the dark squared bishops must bring the rook back to stop them and stop them he does. The rooks are exchanged off and the a-pawn is stopped in its tracks by the king.

Is it all over? At one point Luke thought so but play on he did, final game he wasn't giving up this one without a fight.

When your only major piece left is the bishop you have to use the last weapon in the arsenal. The king. Luke marched his king into Pauls position and Paul decided to get rid of the a-pawn to remove any advantage Luke had.



Or so he thought. My silicon friend says that here just push the c pawn forward and Luke shouldn't be able to stop the d pawn queening. Paul missed it, bringing the king over first to support the c-pawns push. That gave Luke the chance he needed, a small one, but a chance. Now Luke wins the queen race. True Paul puts a queen on the board the move after but Luke gets the first check and goes the pawn up. Paul just has to be careful with the checks, if he can get Luke's extra pawn off the board it's an absolute draw. By lack of time or a long game the mistake was made.



Paul just needs get that last pawn off and it's a draw. Trouble is he's missed a devastating counter blow. Luke pulls the queen to c4, calls check and the queens come off the board. Now the f pawn runs and there's no way to stop it. Paul resigned a few moves later. A horrible way for the game to end but the action never stopped, it was very entertaining all the way. Well done both players.

Wigston 2 0-1 Rugeley Rangers

Steve was the second finisher. Gijs opened with e4 and Steve answered with one of his favourites, the Caro-Kann, or to be more exact the B12 Caro-Kann Defence: Advance Variation, Botvinnik-Carls Defence. What a name!

Both players developed their pieces, Gijs developing the kingside and Steve activating the queenside. After all the exchanges of pawns in the centre both sides were level. Something had to give and when Gijs started pushing the pawns on the kingside Steve made a slight error.



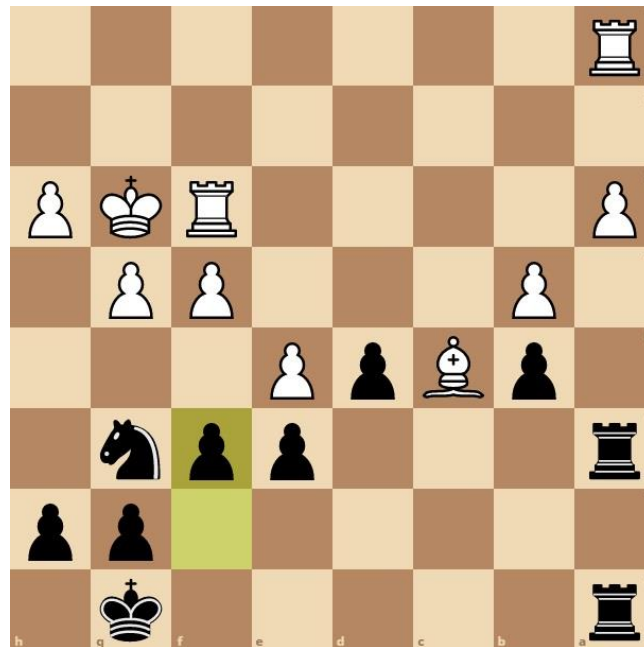
Steve played an interesting move (I believe that's what $?!$ signifies in chess notation). The computer was interested as you can see in playing $Rf-c8$ to contest the c-file. In hindsight, maybe that was correct as the next move from Gijs was $Ra-c1$. Steve moves his queen to b7 and Gijs moves in the bishop to c5. Steve brings his rook over but now the bishop can be backed up with b4. That bishop is going nowhere. With the pushing of a6 by Steve now comes a new problem on the other side of the board.



Gijs pushes g4, kicking the knight and bringing more pawns forward to put pressure on Steve's kingside. Steve has to quickly manoeuvre the knight from e7 to g6 to get it out of danger and

successfully manages it as Gijs brings more pieces forward ready to break. Steve has to do something to relieve some pressure and offers the exchange of queens. It was accepted.

While Steve isn't out of the woods yet, this allows him to build up the pressure on the kingside making Gijs divert the rooks to stop Steve breaking into his position, for now the attack on the kingside is on hold, Steve must do something to stop it entirely.



He chose to push f6, putting pressure on the centre now the rooks are on guard duty, something else has to give. This has the effect Steve needs, the bishop moves off the key square, and now Steve plants a rook on the c file and finally gains control of it. This cannot be allowed to stand. Gijs pulls both rooks over and all four rooks come off the board. Steve has a passed pawn but it's going to be hard to get it to the back rank. The draw was offered and accepted.

Wigston 2 ½-1½ Rugeley Rangers

Matt was third to finish but only a few seconds behind Steve.

As usual Matt had done some research, he found that his opponent liked to play the Sicilian so took a slight gamble and decided to break out an opening he hadn't used for a long time. The computer gives it the rather bland name of B23 Sicilian Defence: Closed Variation, Matt and I'm sure many of you know it by the more popular name the Grand Prix Attack.



Matt is slightly better here and now the attack starts coming. Matt pushed h3 asking what the bishop wanted to do. Andrew took the knight and Matt brought out the queen. After Andrew castled queenside Matt took the knight on c6 and the pawn on e5 giving Andrew the problem of an isolated pawn in the centre and two doubled pawns on the c file, but which one to target?

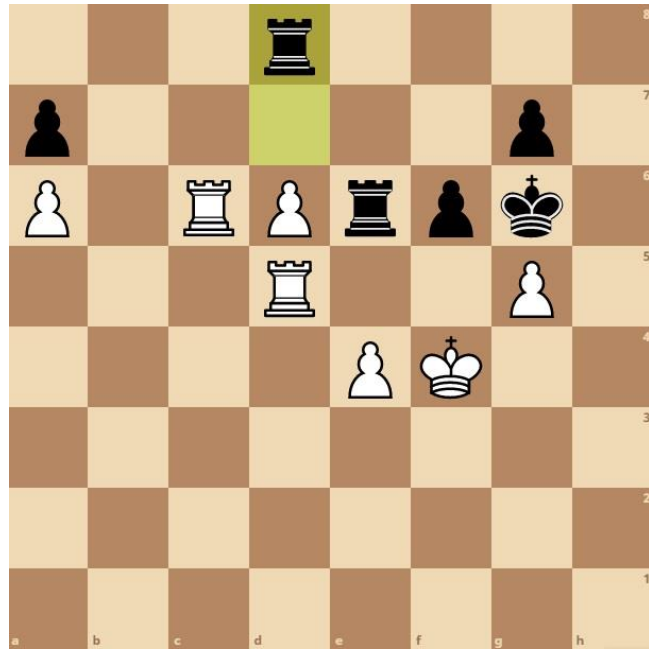
Matt chose to go after the e5 pawn using the queen, moving her over to g3 setting a little trap, now the queen is in line with the King, the bishop can take the pawn on h6 freely. Andrew saw that threat and prioritized king safety, moving the king out of the queen's line of sight, so the pawn on e5 disappeared.

Andrew offered Matt the exchange of queens a few moves later and Matt accepted it but there was a small condition, it also brought the Rook on f1 into the game. The board was getting thinner and thinner. Next problem came here:



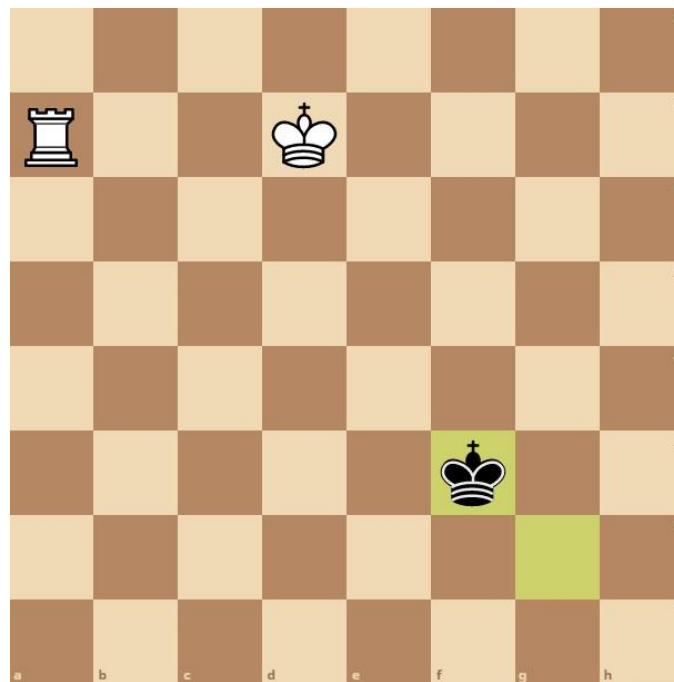
Andrew has just moved the rook to the b file. So, what do you do, push the b pawn and let him defend the c pawn or take the pawn?

Matt chose to take the pawn off, figuring it gives him two passed pawns on the c and d file and when the rook takes the b2 pawn gives the knight a chance to develop to a better square. While Matt was taking the chance to do that, Andrew had exactly the same idea. The knight started making its way into Matt's position, so much so with a check to the king managed to get one of the pawns back before both knights came off the board. This left it as a battle of the rooks. Andrew's rooks were threatening the pawns and making it hard for Matt to make progress but he gave it all he had. While one rook defended the attacked pawns the other manoeuvred to put pressure on and the d-pawn started running. When it was clear all the rooks were stuck looking after the loan pawn on d6 the kings had to get involved.



There was no way to get through on the kingside but if the king can get over to the queenside and support the pawn that would relieve one of the rooks to go cause a little trouble. Exchanging the pawns on f6, Matt moved his king over to c5 and the pawn began its journey to the queening square. Andrew stopped it but had to sacrifice one of the rooks to do it.

That brought it down to a king and rook vs king ending and Matt brought it to a close 14 moves later.



14 moves it took to checkmate. Can you do it faster?

Wigston 2 ½-2½ Rugeley Rangers

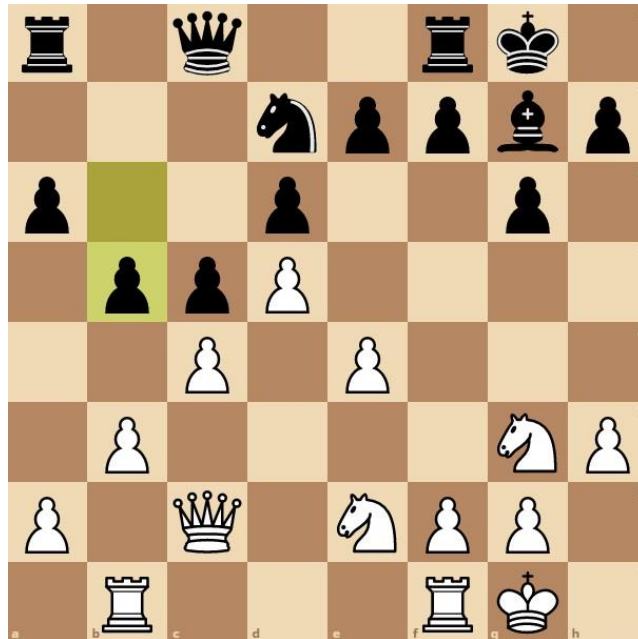
Ryan was the final player to finish. We got a London System opening with the c pawn winding up on c4 rather than the more passive c3, leaving the chance for the knight to get to c3, its more natural square.



The centre looks like it isn't going anywhere, at least for a while. Ryan has to find a way to deal with this. Normally I would want to kick the bishop, but that would actually be counterproductive. In this position, you actually want the knight on h5 to take the bishop, yes this gives you doubled pawns but it also gives free reign for the rook down the kingside. So how do you solve this?

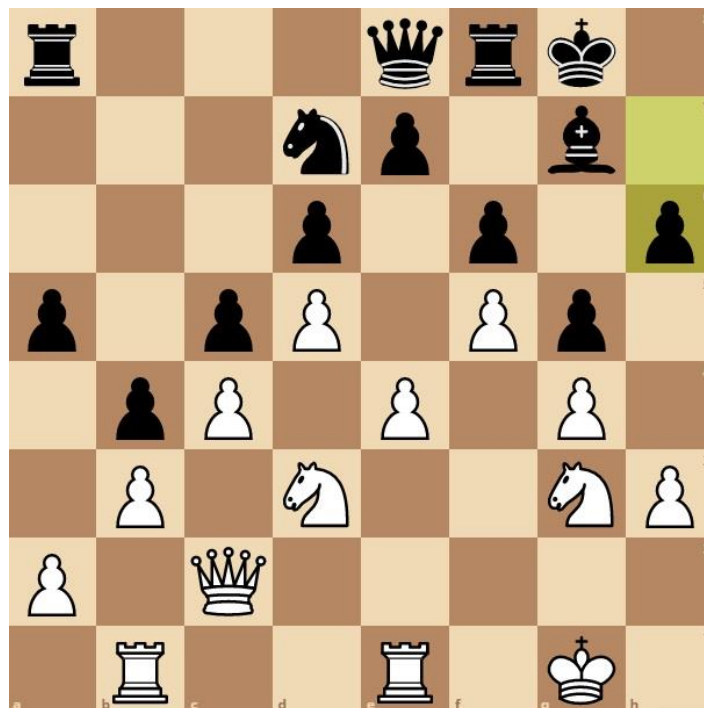
Ryan chose Ng1, back to the starting square but certainly asks what the bishop wants to do.

Bob chose to take the bishop, and Ryan captured with the knight, now Ryan is ready for castling if he wants. Bob chose to move the queen to c8, trying to break into the position down the diagonal the bishop just vacated so it's time to move that h3 pawn to stop a much worse threat. So now the knight and bishop come off but no need to worry about doubling the pawns, Ryan's knight comes to the rescue again and is even helping hold the centre together now. It's definitely locked up, now the action switches from the kingside to the queenside.



Bob starts to push the queenside pawns to break Ryan's pawn chain.

Ryan brings the knights and rooks around to hold back the attack and it seems there wasn't going to be a break there, just locking together of the pawns. The action then shifted back to the centre, Ryan pushed the pawns forward and Bob just pushed past them, locking things down even more.



I don't know about you but I can't see how to make progress here.

Ryan figured a way out, it took him some time but he brought his two rooks and queen to the h-file and prepared to break the h-file open. With everything else locked down there was no worry about a break anywhere else. Trouble is while Ryan was doing all this, Bob was busy preventing it. If Ryan started the attack it looked like Bob's defence holds. There has to be a way through somehow, there was but it looked dangerous.

Ryan found another way though, with all the defenders locked up well on the kingside Ryan switched back to the queenside, the a-pawn wasn't blocked off, so with a rook behind it, now there was a break point away from Bob's pieces. There was just enough time to change the tripled pieces from the kingside to queenside and on comes the attack. It came with such force that in trying to take advantage of a supposed free pawn the knight forked two rooks.



Going the exchange up Ryan started swapping off pieces, the other rook and queen came off, leaving the a-pawn to run and the last remaining rook to back it up, with the bishop locked on the kingside there was no way to stop it. Resignation soon followed.

Wigston 2 ½-3½ Rugeley Rangers

That just leaves the final league table to show you. By my reckoning in these reports Rugeley has played 7, won 2, drawn 2 and lost 3. Given every team we have played has been stronger than us I am pleased to see we finished 5th.

Division 4

Group A

		rd 1	rd 2	rd 3	rd 4	rd 5	rd 6	rd 7	P	W	D	L	MP	SB	
1	MCS Oxford A	mcsa	rgl1 4	gond 3½	wan1 1	cat3 2	wig2 2½	uxka 2	bra2 2	7	4	2	1	10	55
2	Uxbridge Knights A	uxka	bra2 3	cat3 1½	rgl1 3½	wig2 4	gond 3	mcsa 2	wan1 2	7	4	2	1	10	55
3	Wantage	wan1	cat3 3½	wig2 2	mcsa 2½	bra2 1½	rgl1 3½	gond 2	uxka 2	7	3	3	1	9	67
4	Catford Cosmonauts 3	cat3	wan1 ½	uxka 2½	wig2 3	mcsa 2	bra2 2	rgl1 2	gond 2½	7	3	3	1	9	55
5	Rugeley Rangers	rgl1	mcsa 0	bra2 3	uxka ½	gond 2	wan1 ½	cat3 2	wig2 3½	7	2	2	3	6	27
6	Gondaga	gond	wig2 4	mcsa 0	bra2 3½	rgl1 2	uxka 1	wan1 2	cat3 1½	7	2	2	3	6	27
7	Bradford DCA Knights B	bra2	uxka 1	rgl1 1	gond ½	wan1 2½	cat3 2	wig2 2	mcsa 1½	7	2	1	4	5	29
8	Wigston 2	wig2	gond 0	wan1 2	cat3 1	uxka 0	mcsa 1½	bra2 1½	rgl1 ½	7	0	1	6	1	9

My thanks to my fellow team and club mates for playing in the competition and putting up with this team captain throughout the season.

The third season of 4NCL online is due to start in January. Look forward to playing with you all again then. But until next time have you have enjoyed these reports and more to follow next season.

You can find today's games at the following links.

Steve - <https://lichess.org/RlaULmHd/black>

Matt - <https://lichess.org/G2TyjeHi/white>

Luke - <https://lichess.org/Z9JM67Zw/black>

Ryan - <https://lichess.org/nfBhHErg/white>