

A Cotswold Diary – Roger Neat 2004

Greetings, am I crazy or not? Despite sinus trouble and serious medical concerns praying on my mind I decided to go ahead with playing in the above (my favourite event outside of the West of England championship held in Exmouth); having previously withdrawn from the recent Frome Congress. I was also hesitant because I could not stay at my favourite place in Painswick where the people know me and even provide me with a computer to play my international internet games! I am their chessplayer!!! However they did recommend a place in nearby Edge which was excellent and my hostess was very caring and friendly. My drive into Cheltenham is of course second to none over Painswick Beacon; a great way to start the day in sunshine every morning!

So after a total of 500 miles driving and 20 hours of play what was the result?! Friday was spent driving to my venue and settling into my new surroundings without my minder, Liz.

On Saturday Round 1 commenced at the civilised time of 10.30am. There were 22 contestants in the top OPEN section with IM Beaumont and Berry graded 213. Missing were GM Turner and IMs, Crouch and Sherwin. Nevertheless, there was a strong contingent of mid-range graded players who are always dangerous. There were 110 playing in all of the (sections) Congress. Fortunately I had the white pieces and had D. Curnow(171) of Gloucester as my opponent. I opened with my favourite London System and felt good. I caused him to think as I was 30 mins up on the clock at one point. However we both hit time trouble and were unable to record the last 12 moves in our endeavour to reach the time control/ 42 moves! The Arbiter had been watching our game and as we were about to mutually set the clocks back by half an hour to finish the game(we two having amicably agreed that we had made the time control)he asked us to retain the position and to reconstruct the final moves on another board and to write them down. My flag had been the first to fall. We did this and found that we had miscalculated and had made 41 moves only!!! This was high drama as the Arbiter ruled against me and awarded the match to my opponent despite the fact that we had agreed to play on! I was somewhat aggrieved as I had a playable game. At this point I was not sure whether or not I should hurl the board at the Arbiter for intervening when there was no dispute between the parties, but then I am a gentleman and his decision is final according to the brochure. After 3 hours 40 mins play I was naturally devastated by this and seriously wondered whether or not I should ditch the 'Royal Game' and take up Conkers something which I was good at as a boy!!! Arbiters, in my view, are there to settle disputes not to be pro-active where the parties are happy with their situation. Although I did not expect to win the first game I do object to having my chances taken from me by an external force!!!! I had less than an hour to recompose myself for the 2nd Round commencing at 3.30pm. I was so upset that I nearly decided to withdraw from the competition but then I remembered the school motto STRIVE FOR THE BEST. My sinus trouble intensified because of the stress and angina set in too!

At 3.30pm I was scheduled to play D. Beveridge (165) from Hereford. He beat me comfortably last year. He achieves very respectable results in all congresses. Obviously I knew this was going to be tough but at least I had the white pieces again. I pulled myself together and told myself that I had nothing to lose and that this was a new opportunity. So out came my London System to his King's Indian and I held my own and we passed the first time zone and 42 moves and agreed a draw on move 50 after 3 hours 20 mins. It was now 6.50pm - a long intense day of chess playing(seven hours). On the whole I was pleased with my efforts against superior players; after all I am only a mere grade 125 and approaching 60 years of age!!! I decided that I would now try to have something to eat. I went to 'The Butchers Arms' at Sheepscombe which is a lovely drive along secluded leafy lanes.

I had an early night and slept well in my comfortable room. Sunday arrived so after an excellent full English breakfast I set off in beautiful sunshine and enjoyed my 25 minute ride into Cheltenham. Round 3 started sharp at the earlier time of 9.30am. My sinus trouble was giving me hell; the tension of the event adversely affects the condition but I do not use my illnesses as an excuse for my results. I see them as a challenge to manage and for me to extract the best I can out of any situation as life goes on with you or without you! Last year I drew with Ponter 165 when I was 2 pawns up after setting a trap a trap in the London System and it was reported in the tournament handbook that he snatched my hand off when offered the draw ! What no one knew was that my sinus trouble was so bad that I had to return to Painswick immediately in order to take to my sick bed. If I had carried on I would have found it impossible to concentrate or retain my balance. So it was a good decision; particularly as I had a bye in the afternoon and shared the slow starters prize and he won the grading prize. It was my turn to have the black pieces against S. Williams(160). He opened with the Queens Pawn and I was thinking about playing 'Tartakower's Legacy'. He went for an all out attack and I exposed his King and so we battled on with both of us missing opportunities. I offered him a draw and was rejected after making move 42 and the time control. I then had to prove the draw so after 5 hours play and some 60 moves we ended up with a minute each on the clock and a bishop and King each as I hit the last pawn on the board!!! He clearly was not happy but I was well pleased with my stamina and tenacity to stay the course as I have to keep my circulation going by moving from the table and to obviate any angina attacks. My waterworks problem means that I have to make more trips to the loo than usual!! Naturally I was both tired and elated. There was only 30 mins to go before the next round. I knew I would be up against it as I would almost inevitably have another grade 160 to play. 3.30pm came too quickly and my head was pulsating and my heart beating a little too fast. Behold I had the black pieces and the young Computer Science/Maths undergraduate from Bristol University, D. Sisask(166). He opened with the Queens Gambit and I was relatively happy with my position although I was too tired when trying to come up with something original. I could have done with the afternoon bye. We went into a middle/endgame whereby I allowed him an excellent knight which prevented my having any counter attack. On move 39(after 3hours 10 mins) I resigned as I was outplayed by a superior player. To be frank, even if I had not been very tired, I believe that he would or should have beaten me. He won his next game too! It was interesting to note that my previous opponent also lost and then withdrew from the tournament! Having played for over 8

hours I went home and relaxed with a few glasses of red wine and a good meal.

Monday arrived and I packed my car; enjoyed another excellent breakfast and a wonderful drive to St Edwards School Cheltenham. I was very tired but felt good. Round 5 started at 9.30am and I drew the white pieces and a talented schoolboy from Monmouth, S. Thomas(139). I played the London and he responded with a the King's Indian and made two mistakes on moves 7& 9. I picked up a pawn and ruined his kingside. I knew I should win the game but doing it is always different from what you envisage. This was a big psychological thing for me - I needed the win. However my brainpower was limited and I allowed nervous tension to set in and 'rolled over'. He played like I did as a boy; threw everything at me!! I watched the game slip from my grasp and all my aspirations dissolve. It was very painful as I felt that I had let myself down. I deserved better as I can play. We played for 3hours 45 mins and I allowed him to have the pleasure of completing a mating combination on move 45 rather than resign. If I could have shed tears of frustration I would have done so! I felt like not playing the last round as I had to face a 3 hour drive home to Devon in the evening. I then decided I would play but do something mad and hope to lose in 20 moves.

Round 6 started at 3pm and I had the black pieces against E.M. White(155) of Downend Club(Bristol?). He opened King Pawn and I responded with a mad Sicilian variant which I never play. He took 2 hours 10 mins and 30 moves before I resigned - I could not believe it as I was at least 20 mins up on the clock. My heart was not in the game as I was too devastated by my loss to young Thomas. Despite this I feel that I played a good tournament from my standpoint. The tournament arrangements and setting were excellent and even the Arbiter was good!! I thank all involved as these people do not get paid for their massive service to others. It would have been good to have had Westcountryman Bob Jones as the book stall holder as he would have been there for 3 days and offered a wider range of products. Oh well you cannot have everything!! God willing I shall be there next year!

R J Neat's statistics:

6 games with an average of 44 moves (most 60 least 30)

6 games with an average of 3hours 37 mins per game(longest 5 hours shortest 2hours10 mins)

6 opponents with an average grade of 159 (highest 171 lowest 139)

From the diary of a middle aged improver!! Roger.