

Report from the 15. Capelle la Grande-tournament

By Simen Agdestein

I may not be the right person to write a tournament report for the 15th open international tournament in Cappelle la Grande just outside Dunkerque in France as my approach this time was extremely egocentric. My main concern during the tournament, which ran from 13-21 February, was very much myself and few other thoughts than what to do next move really crossed my mind.

Somehow I managed to lure myself into an introspective mode and keep a very narrow focus, even though there may have been a lot of things to worry about – was it Lanka or Landa I was going to play in round six (or was it round seven), what to play against Mikhail Gurevich with black in round eight, how to secure a draw against someone I've never heard of before (sorry Pavel Tregubov, my fault) in the last round, who were the runner-ups in the end, and how much money was at stake. I had no ideas. In the first round I even offered to shake hands with GM Markowski from Poland when I was to play IM Raetsky from Russia, but that was Markowski's fault as he sat in my opponent's chair when I came to the table.

I just focused on making moves, the best I could find in the positions that happened to be in front of me. In this way I managed to enjoy all the good aspects of being a chess player – the art of the game itself - and keep those negative feelings that tend to creep in when you are about to do something that may seem a bit too overwhelming, on an arm length's distance.

This way of thinking is in fact very logical. Moves are something manifest, something real, while plans, for instance, only rarely become reality. Plans are something we often make up after a game, trying to convince an impressed audience that we have foreseen everything. Afterwards a plan may have eternal life in annotations and books. During a game, however, they quickly grow obsolete. It's the moves you drag with you, not the plans.

So be alert. It's the small moves that make the big results, and most of the moves you make you have to invent during the game, unless you have done an inhumane amount of preparations and have a tremendous memory. Feeling good there and then accordingly has to be the one main thing to concentrate on for a chess player. If you're clever you let everything else - who you play, how the tournament situation is, even opening preparations – fade into the background of your mind and just concentrate on the task you're set to do, namely to play good moves.

Normally I'm a lot more influenced by circumstances around me than this, but I think I've learned something from being in a sports environment for many years. When the Norwegian skater Johan Olav Koss took four gold medals in the Lillehammer Olympics in 94, he explained the Norwegian people afterwards that all he was concerned about was to do his next stride [*Is this the right word, Dirk? You come from Holland, you should know...*] as good technically as possible. Some thousands of small strides ended up being perhaps the biggest sports performance ever in Norway's history.

Norway has improved enormously in sports the last decade, which is no coincidence. A lot of thinking and research lies behind, and now even we chess players can take advantage of this, at least the Norwegian ones. In my main occupation at the moment, which is being a chess trainer for ten teenagers at a prestigious sports school called in English *The Norwegian College for Top Athletes*, I'm sent to trainer seminars for exchanging of ideas all the time.

At this special college 15 hours per week in a huge variety of sports are offered in addition to ordinary upper secondary education. Only the best in the different sports are eligible to attend the school. Chess was included last autumn. One of the most important things we've learned from the other sports is the importance of constructive thinking. What you tell your self, your inner speech, is even more important for us chess players, the head being our executive tool.

So, after all this pep talk, what happened with the 104 grandmaster, the 80 international masters and the altogether 615 players that also took part in the tournament barely concerned me. For winning a huge international open this approach turned out to be perfect, but for writing a tournament report? Well, well...

Anyway, after an exciting finish three players ended up with 7,5 points – Mikhail Gurevich, Pavel Tregubov and me - but since I had the best rating performance (2789), I was declared the winner. Very nice, indeed, but as I had been so focused on just making moves and little else, it was only during the prize ceremony while looking out over a huge crowd of very strong players that it really dawned to me that this is an experience I may not have to many times in life. It was a bit like scoring in football (that's unfortunately a long gone experience for me.), you just want to raise your hands and scream YEAH, as the less sophisticated sportsmen at the other branches of this sports college do.

There were a few seconds of ecstasy just there and then, I admit that, but the dream of these seconds - or the money I made (not very much) or the rating points I gained or the few days in the spotlight in Norway because someone gave the press the illusion that because of this performance I was among the top five in the world - were not my main reason for coming to Cappelle la Grande. It was rather my ten young students at the chess school that forced me out of my nice, cosy harmony in my chess office and out to the wolves.

I had promised the kids at least one tour abroad, and after some intensive scanning for an appropriate tournament, the choice fell on Cappelle la Grande. As the budget for such tours and my salary for being the teacher and everything for the wild ones, goes from the same purse, we went the cheapest way possible – boat from Oslo to Kiel, train to Brussels and a bus the organisers had set up from Brussels to the playing site. At the return we even spent one night at the train to save one night's accommodation.

Being a tour operator is a lot more work than you may think, especially when you've never done it before. But that's absolutely nothing compared to the tremendous task of handling over 600 (!) players, as the Cappellian organisers had to deal with. I'm deeply impressed!

Apart from just feeling happy, this was the other thing I was thinking about, standing at the stage during the prize ceremony hearing the local mayor smiling and saying something for me totally incomprehensible. (I don't speak French.) How to appraise the enormous job the organisers had done? After having done a bit of chess organising myself, I've suddenly started to see all kinds of details I've never noticed before. Where have they got all the flags from? And the chairs? And the tables? How did they make all the name plates? Just organising the pairings, giving interesting opponents to both the grandmasters and my students, is quite a feat. And how on earth did they manage to serve three dishes' lunch and dinner and plenty of wine to three or four hundred people eight days in a row, equally delicious every time and to an extremely low price.

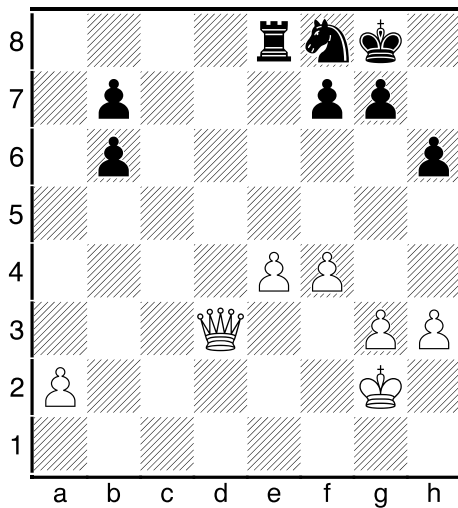
The wine part probably pleased most of the participants, but the delegates from the Norwegian sports college didn't taste any, that's for sure. One of my students were actually suspended from coming with us to France (the main event of the year) because he drank a few beers at a tournament in Gausdal just before. This may sound absurd to the chess people, but drinking and smoking too is not supposed to be part of a top athlete's life – that's what we are told at this special sports school – and such deeds are punished with suspension of the next tour or training camp (yes, we do have training camps too). That's one price we have to pay to be part of the sports world, and may be it's not so stupid?

Anyway, the organisation was tremendous, and I was striving intensively to find a way to express this as I expected the mayor to give me the microphone after his speech. (Isn't it normal that winners of tournaments are exposed to such things?) Fortunately for my nervous system he didn't.

But we, all of us from Norway, surely would like to express our gratitude towards the organisation committee for a very nice tournament, THANKS. We forgive you that you midway didn't believe the students' official ratings were so low and tried to put them in higher rating classes. (My students did just as well as I, relatively speaking, with an average gain of about 70 rating points each.) Even the French guy, who insisted on staying with the nine young Norwegians at a dormitory in the playing hall, became our friend. Be prepared for a Norwegian Viking invasion next year too!

As for the tournament I thought Mikhail Gurevich, who for many years have lived among "decent people" in Brussels, looked like a winner, especially when he had this positions against me in the eight round:

Gurevich,M (2627) - Agdestein,S (2550)
 Open Cappelle la Grande FRA (8), 20.02.1999



I have just blundered my queen against rook and bishop and was not optimistic about my prospects. **41.e5 g6 42.Db5 Tc8 43.a4 Tc6 43.Ta8** would be a mistake due to **44.a4** and the rook is less active on the a-line. **44.Dd3 Se6 45.h4!?** This came rather quickly, which surprised me a bit. Playing for g3-g4 and f4-f5 may be just as logical, but Gurevich seemed to know what he was doing. **45...h5 46.f5 gxf5 47.Dxf5 Tc4 48.Dxh5 Txa4** I've got rid of one important enemy, the a-pawn, but the price on the king side has been high. **49.Df3 Ta5 50.Df5** Gurevich was still playing swiftly. I was more concerned about **50.Dxb7** as I had suddenly seen that taking on e5 would cost a rook after **51.Db8+**. I may fight on with **50...Kg7** (after **50.Dxb7**), but this position has to be lost somehow. **50...b5** To meet **51.h5** with **51...Ta6 52.h6 Sf8. 51.Dg4+ Kh7 52.Db4!** Smart. Now my rook is passively placed. **52...b6 53.Db1+?** But what is this? **53...Kg8 54.Kh3?** And this? **54...b4** Now my rook gets back in the fresh open. Preparing walking with the pawns was more natural for white than going into this. **55.Dxb4 Txe5** One more peasant gone, and only two more to go! **56.Dxb6 Sf8?** If I only could sacrifice my knight for one of his pawn, the draw would be secured, but this is not so easy to achieve, especially not after this move. **56...Sg7**, being ready to take any pawn that comes within reach while walking up and down the e-line with the rook, would have been a lot more precise. **57.Db8 Te4 58.h5 f6!?** A very risky decision as now sacrificing the knight will not be enough. To hold a draw with only rook against queen, the pawn has to be on f7. But I had seen a tricky fortress... **59.Db7 Te5 60.g4 Tg5 61.De7 Sh7 62.h6** It may look like Black is in *zugzwang* but I've got *one* good move... **62...Kh8! 63.Kg3 Tg6 64.De8+ Tg8 65.Df7 Tg5 66.Kf4 Tg8 67.De6 Tg6 68.Dc8+ Tg8 69.Dc2 Tg5 70.Dd1 Tg6**

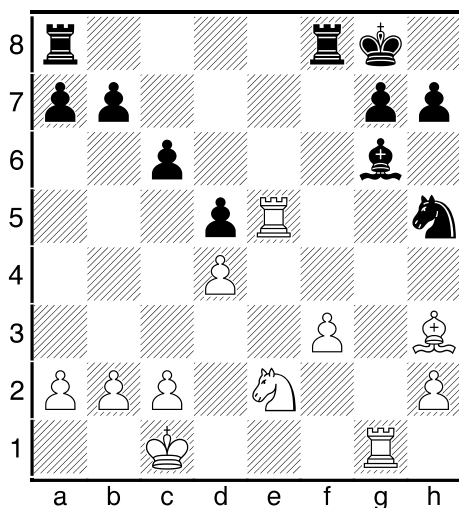
71.Kf5 White can't get through without giving up either the g-pawn or the h-pawn. **71...Txb6**
72.Dd8+ Kg7 73.De7+ and Gurevich offered a drawn, suggesting I looked like a winner, managing to hold this position and even worse positions in earlier rounds. ½-½

In the last round Gurevich mated Alexander Volzhin from Russia so quickly that nobody seemed to register what happened as I can't find the game anywhere. Anyway, winning in the following way is perhaps more typical for Gurevich's style, although this game isn't long either.

Kogan,A (2507) - Gurevich,M (2627)

Open Cappelle la Grande FRA (6), 18.02.1999

1.Sf3 d6 2.d4 f5 3.Sc3 Sf6 4.Lg5 d5!? I'm sure it's theory, but I found it little peculiar to move the d-pawn twice so early in the game with so few pieces developed. **5.Se5 e6 6.g4** Perhaps Kogan felt obliged to take advantage of his lead in development, but this does not seem to be the way to do it. **6...Le7!** Calmly developing. **7.gxf5 exf5 8.Dd3 c6 9.f3 Sh5 10.Lxe7 Dxe7 11.0-0-0 f4!** Black is about to manifest a superior pawn structure. **12.e4 fxe3 13.Dxe3 0-0 14.Tg1 Sd7 15.Te1 Sxe5 16.Dxe5 Dxe5 17.Txe5 Lf5** Black is clearly better in the ending, and in such circumstances Gurevich is on top – normally (see previous game). **18.Se2 Lg6 19.Lh3**



19...Txf3! The tactics are in Black's favour. **20.Lg4 Tf2 21.Txb5 Lxb5 22.Lxb5 g6 23.Lg4 Te8 24.Kd1 Txb2** The rooks are much stronger than the pieces here. **25.b3 Kf7 26.Sf4** White is lost anyway. **26...Te4 27.Se6 Kf6 28.Sc5 Txd4+ 29.Kc1 Tdd2 0-1**

Also Pavel Tregubov had his chances to win this tournament. In the last round fate was not on his side:

Tregubov,P (2570) - Agdestein,S (2550)

Cappelle la Grande (9), 1999

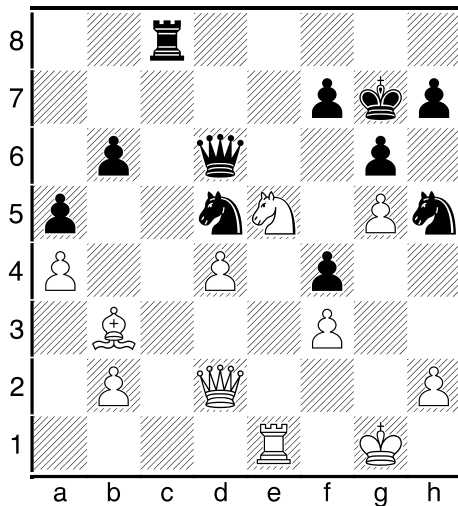
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Sf3 Sf6 4.Sc3 dxc4 5.a4 Lf5 6.Sh4 Lc8 If I only had been little bit more observant I would have noticed the following game two rounds earlier:

Tregubov,P (2570) - Savchenko,S (2539)

Cappelle la Grande (7), 1999

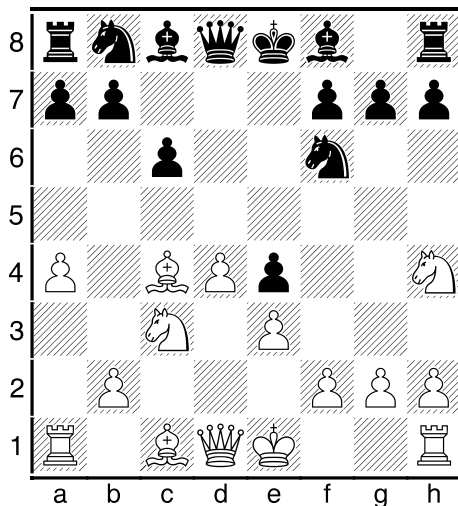
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Sf3 Sf6 4.Sc3 dxc4 5.a4 Lf5 6.Sh4 e6!? **7.Sxf5 exf5 8.e3 Lb4** I think Mathew Sadler in one of his well written books on the Slav recommends putting a knight on b4 rather

than the bishop. 9.Lxc4 0-0 10.0-0 Sbd7 11.Ld2 a5 12.Se2 Lxd2 13.Dxd2 De7 14.Sf4 Sb6 15.Lb3 Tfd8 16.Dc2 g6 17.Sd3 Sbd5 18.Se5 Kg7 19.Tfe1 Tac8 20.Tac1 c5 If Black doesn't take action, White eventually will with the plan f2-f3 and e3-e4. Also the pawn on a5 is a bit weak if Black remains passive. 21.Dd2 b6 22.f3 cxd4 23.exd4 Dd6 24.Txc8 Txc8 25.g4!? 25... f4? It's understandable that Black wants to keep the f-line closed, but this allows a tactical blow. Better is 25...fxg4 although white's initiative and pressure along both diagonals and lines is awkward. 26.g5 Sh5



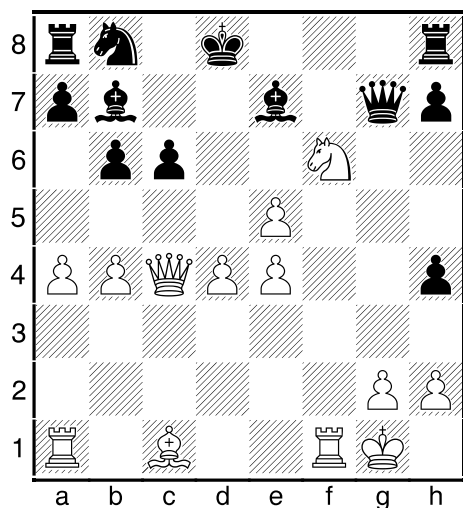
27.Sxf7! Dd7 27.Kxf7 Te5 regains the material. 28.Se5 Dd8 29.Sg4 and Savchenko didn't want to play anymore. 1-0

Well, 6...Lc8, as I played, (instead of 6...e6) is also perfectly okay.
7.e3 e5 8.Lxc4 e4?



But this is extremely dubious. I knew it, but by now, after eight good rounds, I'd got the impression I would get away with everything. And if I was lucky, my opponent was the type who preferred calm and quiet positions. Of course taking on d4 is the way to play. **9.Db3** Just 9.0-0 g5 10.f3 is also scary for Black. **9...g5** The point of no return has been passed. **10.Lxf7+ Ke7 11.f3 Db6 12.Dc4** I was more worried about 12.Da2, when 12...Sa6 13.fxe4 Sb4 14.Dc4 going for the rook on a1 with 14...Sc2+ did not look appealing considering the

many White pieces around the naked Black king. Now I've got a small trick that makes the situation around the monarch less obscure. **12...Se8!** Threatening 13...Sd6. 12...gxh4 13.fxe4 is horrible for Black. **13.Lxe8 Kxe8 14.fxe4 gxh4 15.0-0 Dc7** White has tremendous compensation for the piece, but it's not all over yet (although "it's getting there", as Bob Dylan points out on one of his latest albums, if not the last). **16.e5** 16.Sd5 would have been more precise. **17...Dg7** Now I could have played 17...De7 as 18.Sd5 Le6 19.Sc7+ Kd7! is nothing to worry about, and after 18.e4 Sd7 I'm threatening to liquidate with 19...Sxe5 20.dxe5 Dc5+! or gain some time with 19...Sb6. **17.Sd5! b6** I didn't see any other way to get the pieces out. **18.Sf6+ Kd8 19.b4! Lb7 20.e4 Le7**



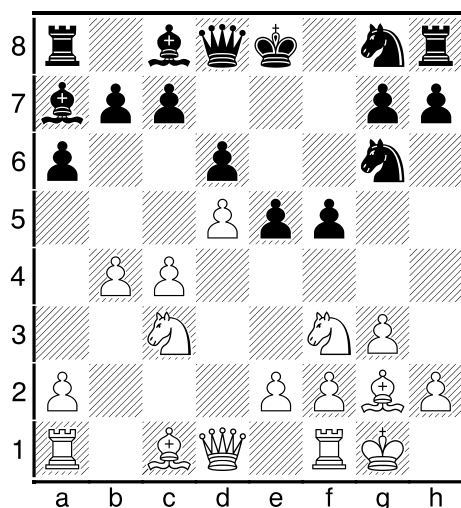
My opponent, having played swiftly and with confidence so far, now for some reason took a long think. I just thought 21.d5 looked crushing. Also 21.b5 or even the calm 21.La3 would not have been bad. **21.Ta2 Sd7 22.Taf2 Dg6** I realised my opponent was about to lose the thread. **23.Sxd7 Kxd7 24.d5** During the game and in the post-mortem too 24.Tf6! looked very strong. I may be a rook up after 24...Lxf6 25.Txf6 De8, but how to get anything in to play after 26.e6+ Kc8 27.Lh6! Probably this position is dead lost for me – the central pawns are just walking on. **24...Taf8!** Now I've solved most of my problems. **25.d6 Txf2 26.Txf2 Tf8** Necessary. **27.dxe7 Txf2 28.Dd4+ Kxe7 29.Dxf2 c5?!** First I thought I could just take on e4 with the queen, but then I saw 30.Df6+ Ke8? 31.De6+ and the bishop joins the mating battery with check, but I play of course 30...Kc7 and White has nothing better than to take the perpetual.. **30.bxc5 Lxe4 31.Le3 Ke6 32.cxb6 h3** An important move. **33.g3 axb6 34.Lxb6 Lg2 35.Df6+** Playing for a win with 35.De1+ is risky. **35...Dxf6 36.exf6 Kxf6 37.Kf2 Ke6 38.a5 Kd7 39.a6 Kc8 40.g4 Kb8 41.Kg3 Ka8** Finally a peaceful place for the king! **42.Ld4** and Tregubov offered a draw. 1/2-1/2

One of the many players in the tournament I respect a lot is Tony Miles, and I expected him to be among those catching me up in the end. However, the following game took him back:

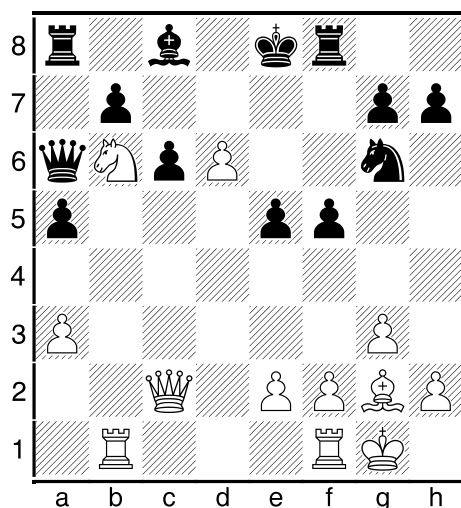
Volzhin,A (2548) - Miles,A (2609)

Open Cappelle la Grande FRA (7), 1999

1.d4 Sc6 Provocative. **2.c4 e5 3.d5 Sce7 4.Sc3 Sg6 5.g3 Lc5 6.Lg2 d6 7.Sf3 a6 8.0-0 f5** It looks like Black has achieved everything he can dream of, a closed position in the centre with the black squared bishop on the right side and good attacking chances. However, he is lagging behind in development, a fact Volzhin brilliantly exploits. **9.b4 La7**



10.c5! Miles had heard from some bastard before the game that Volzhin was not that strong tactically, an illusion that is quickly killed. **10...dxc5 11.La3 Dd6** It's difficult to criticise the great masters, but somehow I believe it should be possible to put up more resistance than what happened in the game. What's for instance happening after **11...cxb4 12.Lxb4 Sge7?** **12.bxc5 Lxc5 13.Lxc5 Dxc5 14.Tc1 Dd6** Was white threatening anything? To me **14...S8e7** looks quite possible. **15.Sd2 Sf6 16.Sc4 Db4 17.d6!** Now serious problems are looming. **17...c6 17...Dxc4?** **18.Sd5** is loosing right immediately. **18.Sa4 Sd7 19.a3 Db5 20.Dc2 a5** A sad necessity. **21.Tb1 Da6 22.Scb6 Sxb6 23.Sxb6 Tf8** Black could just as well resigned. **23...0-0 24.d7** would cost a piece.



24.Lxc6+! bxc6 25.Dxc6+ Kf7 26.Dxa8 Dxa8 27.Sxa8 La6 28.Sb6 Lxe2 29.Tfe1 Ld3 30.Tbc1 Td8 31.d7 1-0 Yes, Bob Dylan, now it's all over.