

Tournament report from the 17th Cappelle la Grande Open, France, February 2001:

And the winner is...

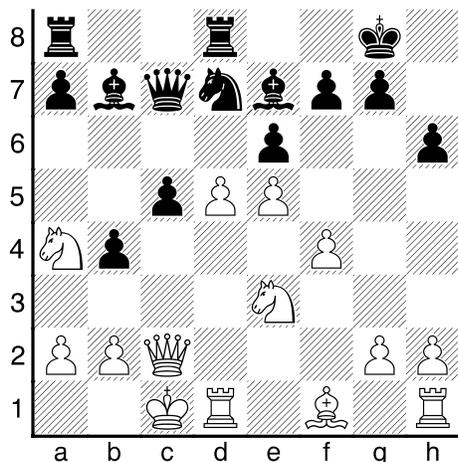
Well, we all thought it was Einar Gausel. We had already called the Norwegian press, and by chance we had a Norwegian film team there. This was a scoop that the daily TV-news simply couldn't ignore. Even in a sport like chess in a country like Norway. A Norwegian winner of the biggest open in the world!

Unfortunately we had to leave before the prize ceremony to catch the night train from Brussels and then the boat from Kiel back to dear snowy Norway. It was only on the boat the next day that we heard from the film crew that it actually wasn't Gausel that received the big winner's trophy. It was some Belgian with a Russian name. Who could that be? Mikhail Gurevich? No, Gausel had beaten him in a great game in the eight' round and certainly put him out of the final gold race with the following knight sacrifice:

Mihail Gurevich (2694) – Einar Gausel (2481) [D11]

Cappelle la Grande 2001 (8)

1.c4 c6 2.Sf3 d5 3.d4 Sf6 4.Db3 e6 5.Lg5 h6 6.Lh4 dxc4 7.Dxc4 b5 8.Dc2 Lb7 9.Lxf6 This looks strange, but 9.e4 directly would lose a pawn after 9...g5 10.Lg3 g4. **Dxf6 10.e4 Sd7 11.e5 Dd8 12.Sc3 Le7 13.0–0–0?! White's set-up is ambitious, probably too ambitious. 13...b4 14.Sa4 Da5 15.Sd2 0–0 16.Sc4 Dc7 17.f4 Tfd8 18.Se3 c5!** White's been lagging behind in development, and now the time for punishment has come. **19.d5** Gurevich was probably hoping for 19...exd5 20.Sxd5 Lxd5 21.Txd5 Sb6 22.Sxb6 axb6 23.Lc4 with a "Gurevichian" advantage. Gausel's next move came as an unpleasant surprise.



19...Sxe5! 20.fxe5? After the game Gausel suggested 20.d6 as White's best, but after for instance 20...Txd6 21.fxe5 Txd1† 22.Sxd1 Dxe5 Black has a clear advantage. White's co-ordination is awful. John Speelman suggested in his column in *The Spectator* 20...dxe6!?. **20...Lg5 21.Df2 Dxe5 22.Te1 Lxd5** Black has three pawns and an attack for the piece. Probably the advantage is

already decisive. **23.h4** After 23.Kb1, 23...Lc6 24.Sc4 De4†!? 25.Txe4 Lxe4† 26.Lxd3† Ka1 27.Lxc4 is a quite impressive line, although Black of course doesn't have to sacrifice the queen. **Lf4 24.Lb5 Lxa2** Four pawns, and the attack is still raging. The end is near. **25.Th3 c4 26.Tf3 Df5 27.Dc2 Lxe3+ 28.Texe3 Dxb5 29.Txf7** A last desperate try. **Kxf7 30.Dh7 Td3 0–1**

For some reason Gurevich appeared only *after* the first round. It's an improvement over last year when he didn't play the *two* first rounds. Then he had obligations in the German *Bundesliga*. What the reason was now, I don't know. But Gurevich with his startling 2694 rating points doesn't seem to mind playing players with a whole lot less rating than his. Perhaps he was hoping to pass the 2700-limit by beating some "weaklings". The risk seems to me to be higher than the gain, but despite the loss to Gausel, he made a 2671 performance with 6,5 out of 8.

After beating Gurevich, Gausel was going in to the last round with half a point's lead and a much higher rating performance than his closest rivals. So when he agreed on a draw in only 8 moves in the final round against the Danish GM Peter Heine-Nielsen, we were sure we'd got a Norwegian winner. In Cappelle la Grande rating performance is the decisive factor when more than one player have equally many points.

Gausel (36) is among the few in Norway who works only with chess. He's got an excellent daily column in the second biggest evening paper in Norway (I've got the column in the biggest ☺) and another one in a weekly magazine. Combined with some private lessons on the ICC and some commentary work on an Internet site run by the organisers of the Mind Sports Olympiad (<http://msoworld.com/>), he surely has chess way up to his ears.

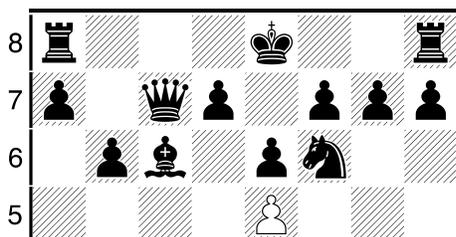
He also has a little child. The reason for coming, he said before the tournament, was to get some sleep. (Sounds familiar, I've got two kids...) So this was actually a holiday for Gausel. A holiday with a 2728 performance!

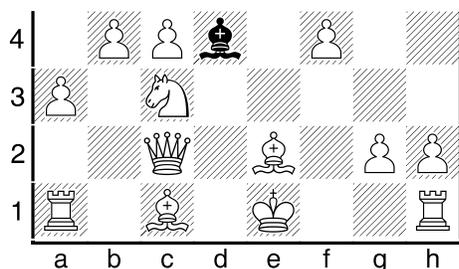
But who was the runner up? Vladimir Chuchelov! Not totally out of the blue, but certainly not from the limelight on the absolute top boards, Chuchelov was creeping up from behind and made a great finish with the following spectacular win:

Alexander Goldin (2595) – Vladimir Chuchelov (2539) [E12]

Cappelle la Grande 2001 (9)

1.d4 Sf6 2.c4 e6 3.Sf3 b6 4.a3 La6 5.Dc2 Lb7 6.Sc3 c5 7.e4 cxd4 8.Sxd4 Sc6 9.Sxc6 Lxc6 10.Le2 Dc7 11.f4 Lc5 12.b4 Not the most common line, but in Pert – Chandler, London 2000, White achieved a clear advantage after 12... Ld4 13.e5 Lxc3+ 14.Dxc3 Se4 15.De3 0–0 16.0–0 f6 17.exf6 Sxf6 18.Lb2. **12...Ld4 13.e5**





13...Sd5!! This is a serious improvement. **14.Se4** 14.cxd5 La4! regains material. But what now? 14...Lxa1 15.cxd5 exd5 16.Sd6† Kf8 17.b5 is not tempting. **14...Sxf4! 15.Sd6+** After 15.Lxf4 Lxe5, White's pieces are too loose. **15...Dxd6!!** 15...Kf8 16.Lxf4 Lxa1 looks horrible for Black, but this is fantastic. **16.exd6 Sxg2+ 17.Kd2 Lxa1** Knight, rook and two pawns for a queen is the interesting material balance. **18.Lb2 Lxb2 19.Dxb2 0-0 20.Tg1 f6 21.Dc3 Sh4 22.b5 Lb7 23.c5** White is trying to realise his majority, but it's a long way to go. **23...bxc5 24.Dxc5 Sg6 25.Dc7 Ld5 26.Tc1 26.Dxd7?** Tf7 and the queen is trapped. **26...Se5** Chuchelov has centralised his pieces nicely. **27.Da5 f5!** This pawn won't be easy to stop. **28.Tc7 f4 29.Dc3 Tf5 30.a4 f3 31.Lf1 f2 32.Kc1 Tg5** 32...Le4 to play Ld3 next looks clearer. **33.Tc8+ Kf7?!** Chuchelov is getting a bit fancy, but 33...Txc8 34.Dxc8† Kf7 35.Dc5! (35.Dc2 Tf5 followed by Lc4 wins the bishop) Lc4 36.Dxa7! Lxf1 37.Dxf2† Tf5 is not totally clear either. **34.Txa8 Tg1 35.Dh3?** This is the decisive mistake. As one of my readers of my newspaper columns pointed out, 35.Dxe5! Txf1† 36.Kd2 Td1† 37.Kc3! is a draw. Black better take the perpetual as 37...f1D? 38.Dh5† leaves White on top. **35...Lxa8 36.Kd2 Le4 37.Ke3 Ld3!** Black is just in time. **38.Dh5+ Kf6 39.Lh3 f1D 40.Lxf1 Txf1** The queen is now no match for the pieces. **41.Kd2 Tf4 42.Dd1 Lxb5! 0-1 43.axb5 Td4†.**

After such a game one can only congratulate. The performance was 2736, 8 points higher than Gausel's. The win must be considered deserved.

Altogether 702 players took part, which is a solid record in the 17-year's history of the tournament. The special thing about this tournament is that everyone plays in the same group. Some intelligent system makes sure everybody, both the 1500 players and the GMs, meets players at an appropriate strength. You never oppose a player that is *a priori* unbeatable or the opposite, you always have to concentrate. The interesting aspect here is rating performance, not how many points you score.

For the Norwegian film team that was there, just watching the participants was a thrill. For their final exam clip at the *Film and TV Academy* in Oslo they had chosen chess and the chess department at the Norwegian College for Top Athletes as their topic. In Norway chess is not considered a sport. Their task was to prove that it is. Following us to the biggest chess open in the world seemed to be an excellent idea.

In Cappelle la Grande they certainly found lots of highly original material. In which other sport can you find for instance a six year old girl – Veronica Foisor scored 2,5 points and made a sweet

1503 performance – or an 86 year old woman – Nathalie Baesjou scored 3,5 points with a 1512 performance – competing in the same class as 92 international grandmasters?

Or men and women competing on equal terms? 68, or about 10 % of the participants, were women. This is about the number of girls playing chess in the whole of Norway. The Netherlands made the tournament a training camp for they're national female players, and from East Europe there were plenty. Considering what we chess players are used to, if I dare say so, the women made by their pure beauty a distinct impact on the environment.

But girls were not the only “minority” group represented in Cappelle la Grande. The organisers, lead by Sylvie and Jean Paul Templeur, give generous offers of accommodation, lodging and appearance fee according to rating to a long list of players. Conditions are not only for the best. Lots of federations are offered free places. This time 54 countries were represented.

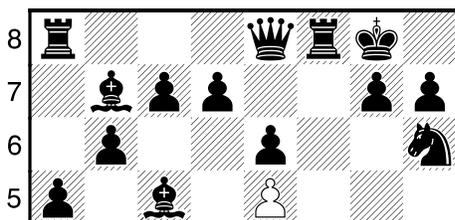
Even a contingent from China was there. The Chinese WGM Peng Zhaoqin, who is now married to a Dutch and represents the Netherlands, had organised for some players from the province *Canton* to come. China is still very centralised. Invitations normally have to go through the national federation's general secretary in Beijing. Considering the few occurrences of Chinese chess players in the open tournaments around, permits seem to be restricted. Probably money is limited too. So it was nice to see some of them live.

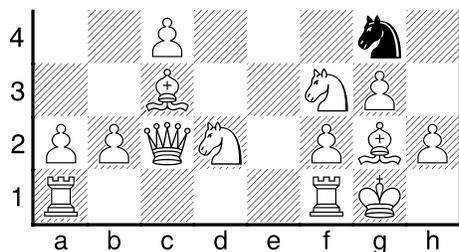
One morning at breakfast I had to intervene in a lively talk among the Chinese and asked Peng Zhaoqin what the reason for China's sudden uplift in chess was. “Oh, that is very simple, they just train a lot, many hours per day.” The best Chinese chess players are given state salary (probably not very much for our standards) for working with chess and central organisation seems to work well. Probably we've only seen the top of the iceberg, like the Russians before borders were opened in 1989. In Cappelle la Grande there were three Chinese players – Yu Shaoteng (6,5), Liang Chong (6) and Li Shilong (6) – all fighting on the top boards till the very end. They certainly had something to offer the audience:

Nikolai Pushkov (2546) - Yu Shaoteng (2493) [E15]

Cappelle la Grande 2001 (6)

1.d4 Sf6 2.Sf3 e6 3.c4 b6 4.g3 La6 5.Db3 Sc6 6.Ld2 Lb7 7.d5 7.Lc3 Se4 8.a3 Sxc3 9.Dxc3 Le7 10.Dd3 d5 11.cxd5 Dxd5 12.e4 Da5+ 13.Sbd2 0–0–0 was the beginning of a wild mess in Timman– J. Polgar, Malmö 2000. **7...Se7 7...exd5 8.cxd5 Se7 9.d6** is perhaps better for White. **8.dxe6 fxe6 9.Lg2 Sf5 10.0–0 Lc5 11.Lc3 0–0 12.Sbd2 De8!** Black's plan is simple, attack with all the pieces, but the execution is intricate. **13.Dc2 a5** The bishop's grand position at c5 has to be safeguarded, even at the cost of a piece. **14.e4 Sh6 15.e5** It looks like White is winning something.





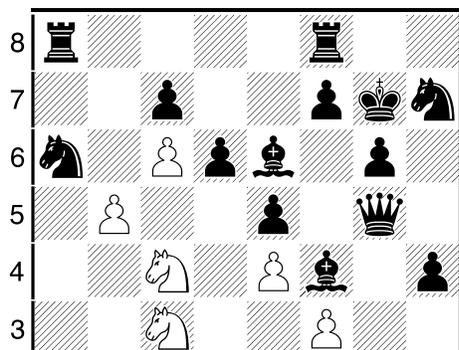
15...Sfg4! 16.Sg5 Tf5!! It's what's left on the board that matters. Black has as an overwhelming battery on the kingside, but it is in not clear. **17.Lxb7 Dh5 18.Sdf3 Tb8** Not 18... Tf8 19.h4! and the attack is blocked. **19.Le4 Txf3!** After 19...Txg5, for instance 20.Dd2 is good. Black's coordination is broken. **20.Sxf3 Dh3!** A calm move in the middle of the storm. **21.Lxh7+ Kh8 22.Ld2 Tf8 23.Lf4?** Pushkov breaks down. After 23.Lxh6 Txf3 24.Lxg7† Kxg7 25.Dg6† Kf8, White has at least a perpetual, but can also play for a win with 26.Dh4!/? **23...Txf4 0-1** After 24.gxf4 Dxf3, White has no pieces left to defend the king. 24...Dh3 or 24...Dxf4 followed by penetration on h2 is too much to bear.

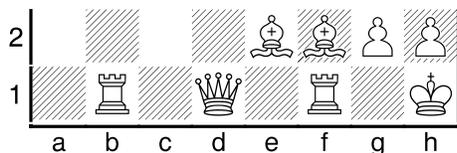
Another far traveller was young Amon Simutowe from Zambia. I have travelled a bit in Southern Africa and played a simul in Lusaka, Zambias capital, in 1994. Enthusiasm was fantastic, but obviously chess was not the sport the Africans were most interested in. Now, according to Simutowe, there are about 150 registered chess players in the whole of Zambia. It's then very impressive that out of this a player of Simutowe's strength arises. In Cappelle la Grande he took 6,5 points and made a good 2557 performance. Simutowe could very well be Africa's next grandmaster.

Daniele Vismara (2231) – Amon Simutowe (2462) [E92]

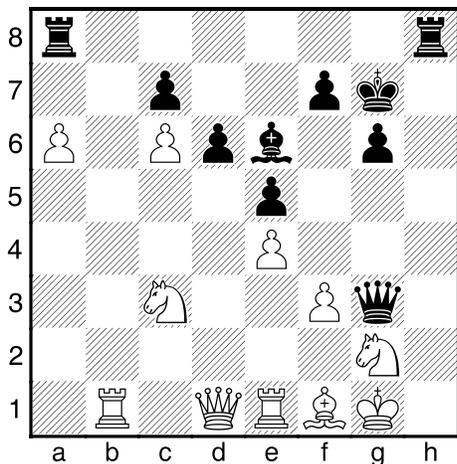
Cappelle la Grande 2001 (2)

1.Sf3 Sf6 2.c4 g6 3.Sc3 Lg7 4.e4 d6 5.d4 0-0 6.Le2 e5 7.d5 a5 8.Lg5 h6 9.Lh4 Sa6 10.Sd2 De8 11.0-0 Sh7 12.b3 h5 13.f3 Lf6 14.Lf2 h4 15.a3 Ld7 16.Tb1 De7 17.b4 axb4 18.axb4 Lg5 19.c5 Lf4 20.Kh1 I don't think this is a good move order. In Xu Jun - Wang Pin, Beijing 1996, 20.Sc4 Dg5 21.Kh1 Sf6 22.De1! happened and Black couldn't defend the h-pawn. **22...Kg7! 21.c6 21.De1** can now be answered with 21...Th8!, and it's always dangerous to take on h4, for instance 22.Lxh4 Sg5 23.Sc4 Txh4! 24.Th8 with a mating attack. **21...bxc6 22.dxc6 Le6 23.Sc4 Dg5 24.b5**





24...Sf6!? What follows looks impressive. **25.bxa6 Sh5 26.Te1 Sg3+ 27.Kg1** Opening the h-line with 27.hxg3 or 27.Lxg3 was out of question. **27...h3! 28.hxg3 Lxg3 29.Lxg3 Dxc3 30.Se3 hxg2 31.Sxg2 Th8 32.Lf1** And now the finale blow:



32...Th1+! 33.Kxh1 Df2! Very pretty. **34.Sf4 Th8+ 0-1** White can only prolong the mate.

The Italian Vismara, by the way, almost made a GM-norm with 6 points and a 2557 performance, which is a fantastic result considering his own rating is 2231.

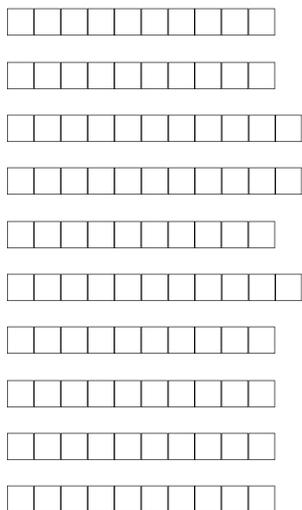
My own goal for the tournament was mainly to stay at the stage or near the stage as long as possible. A small mistake and you're suddenly sitting among the crowd in the intimate playing hall. I made my crucial mistake in round three and didn't manage to repair completely.

Being a trainer at the chess department of the Norwegian College for Top Athletes, I've really worked a lot with chess the last three years, probably more than I've done for the rest of my life together. But the pay off hasn't been tremendous. Training others is something quite different from training your self.

Julian Hodgson, my colleague in the German club Lübeck, seems to have big success with teaching kids so weak they don't even know the chess rules. It makes his own playing more relaxed, he says. I just get tired and confused.

Long time ago, when I was at top, I used to prepare before tournaments by looking at endgames. I tried this approach again, despite loud protests from my students. One student had headache for the rest of the day, he said, by just looking at the knight in the following study by Grigoriev (1934):

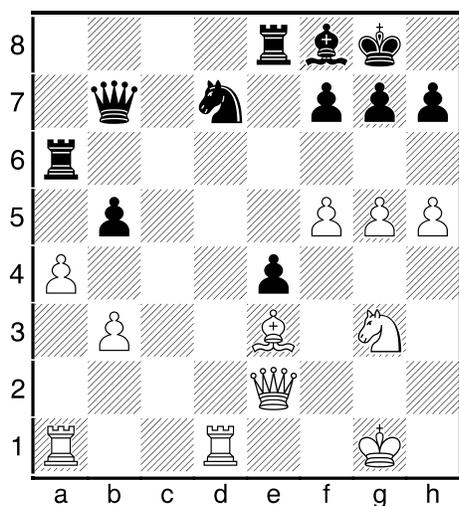
White to move has a hard task drawing.



1.Kd3 Kf7 2.Kc4 Kg6 2...Kg7 3.Kxb4 Kxh7 4.Kc4 and White's king reaches the crucial corner. **3.Sf8+** **3.Kxb4 h5** and both the king and the knight is outside the pawn's reach. **3...Kf5** It looks like the h-pawn will queen. **4.Sd7 h5 5.Sc5 5.Sb6 h4 6.Sd5 Ke4** loses for Black. **5...h4 6.Sb3!! 6.Sd3 h3 7.Sf2 h2 8.Kxb4 Kf4 9.Kc4 Kf3 10.Sh1 Kg2 11.Kd3 Kxh1 12.Ke2 Kg2** loses. **6...h3 7.Sd2 h2 8.Sf1 h1D 9.Sg3+ 0,5-0,5** An impressive knight manoeuvre, indeed.

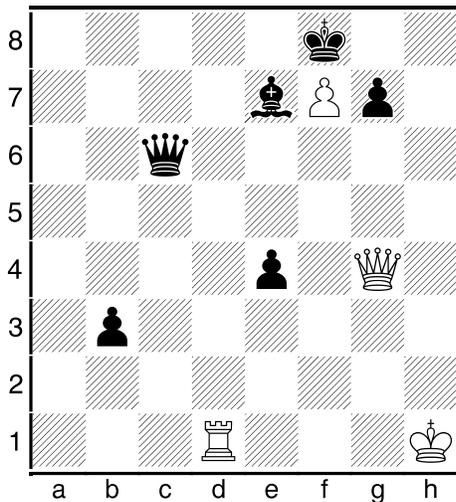
It's a balance; is the training more worth than the confusions it causes? A difficult question. In the first round I first blundered a piece, and more was to come:

Stefan Kristjansson (2371) – Simen Agdestein (2591)
Cappelle la Grande 2001 (1)



30...bxa4?? 31.Txd7 Dxd7 32.Dxa6 I have some play for the piece, but it shouldn't be enough. But I wasn't too worried. Somehow I thought we still had 18 moves to make to the time control, and my opponent was in a hopeless time trouble, I thought... At the Norwegian score sheets,

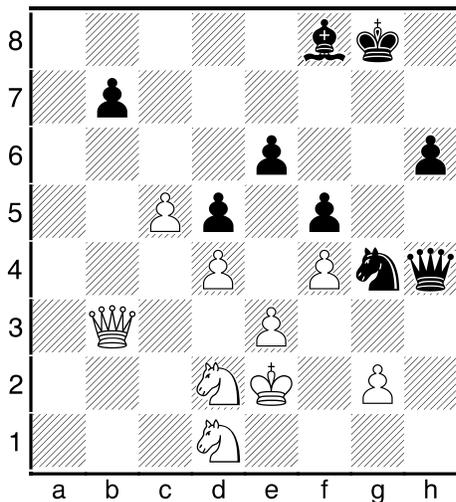
after having written all the moves on the left column, you still have ten moves left on the upper right side to move 40. I realised that this was not the case here only when my opponent confidently raised up after making his 40th move. He had six seconds left on the clock and I still thought he had ten more moves to make. That was the second shock of the day. Fortunately, I'd got some pawns by then. Some moves later, we had this position:



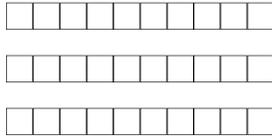
Black has good winning chances. Nicely, my opponent gave me a chance to execute the win with a nice manoeuvre: **50.Dd7? Dxd7 51.Txd7 e3! 52.Kg2 Lb4!** This gains a decisive tempo, blocking the b-line for White's rook. 53.Kf3 b2 54.Td1 Ld2 55.Tb1 Lc1 wins easily. **0-1**

In the next round there was another ending:

Simen Agdestein (2591) – Spyridion Skembris (2440)
Cappelle la Grande 2001 (2)



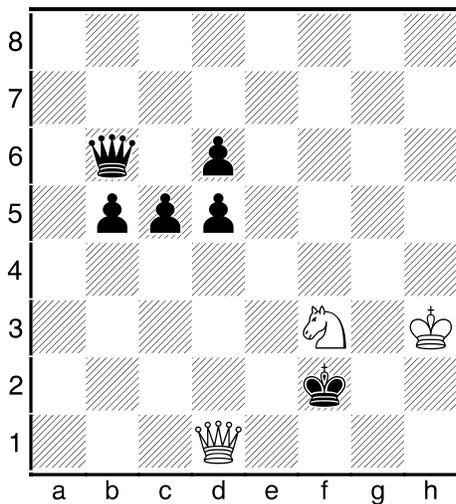
Black has a weak b-pawn, but thought he had some counter play on the kingside. **41.Sd1 Dh1?!**



53.a5?? Very bad, but by now the confusion was complete. Shirazi responded the gift with a blunder. **Kxf6??** After 53...d3†! the position is actually a draw, but it's white who has to be careful. 54.Ke3 Kxf6! 55.a6 c3 56.a7 c2 57.Kd2 e3† and White is in grave danger after 58.Kxd3 c1D 59.a8D Dd2† 60.Kc4 e2. 54.Kd2 is better, but Black has a draw with 54...Kd4 55.Sxe4 (other moves is not better) Kxe4 56.a6 c3† 57.Kxc3 Ke3 58.a7 d2 59.a8D d1D. Therefore, White should have played 53.Sg4†! before Blacks frees the d4 square for the king. After 53...Kf4 54.g3† (just to be sure the king goes far away) Kxg3 55.a5, the win is easy. **54.a6 c3 55.a7 d3+ 56.Kd1!** The pawns look scary, but now it's plain. **c2+ 57.Kc1 c5 58.a8D Ke5 59.Dc6 Kd4 60.Dd6+ Ke3 61.Dxc5+ Ke2 62.Dh5+ 1-0**

Later in the tournament I bought a study book from the portable East-European bookstore in the lobby. That certainly didn't reduce the confusion. After trying for a while to solve the following study (Kubbel, 1940), I can only say. Watch out for queens and knights, they can kill you!

White to play and win.



The solution is, not surprisingly, surprising. **1.Sh2** Threatening mate. **Ke3 2.Sg4+ Kf4** Or **2...Ke4 3.Sf6+ Kf5 4.Sd7** with mate on g4 when the queen moves. **3.Df1+ Ke4 3...Kg5 4.Df6+ Kh5 5.Dh6** mate. **4.Sf6+ Kd4 5.Dd1+ Kc4 6.Dxd5+ Kc3 6...Kb4 7.Da2! 7.Da8!** and **8.Nd5** traps the queen.

Oh, my dear head. I need a holiday.

Being the tour leader for a big group can also be quite exhausting. At the end of the tournament I met the Icelandic GM Helgi Olafsson in the lobby. He had followed the Norwegian example and was there with a group of about 18 young people. Now one was sick. He felt he had to show some responsibility at the end of a very hard week, trying to call a doctor. "It's bit more difficult than I imagined", was Helgi's humorous and dry understatement.

I had a few less to follow. This time our group consisted of 16 lively fellows, most students at the school but also a few invited companions. In Kiel even two German friends joined the group. So we were quite a gang taking the train through Germany, spending the night at the youth hostel in Liege, visiting the EU Commission in Brussels, eating, finding places to leave luggage, handling tickets and money and so on.

But the enthusiasm for Cappelle la Grande is tremendous. This is the peak of the year, the one tournament we simply have to take part in. This was the third time. I tried before the tournament to suggest perhaps we should try another tournament this time, but the response was unanimous: "Why go somewhere else? The Cappelle la Grande tournament is perfect!"

They obviously can't get enough of the place, although it apparently isn't that much about it that should attract. Almost 20 young people all installed in one big room for a whole week? How is that like? Fortunately, I don't know. I didn't stay there. Like most of the players, I stayed at a three-star hotel in central Dunkerque about five kilometres away.

Some mental preparation is definitely needed to make such an adventure with so many people work. Drinking is strictly forbidden. That's the one absolute rule. The rest is supposed to be solved by using common sense. My policy has been to intervene as little as possible. Don't mess with what's "perfect". It actually goes quite well. There were arguments and complaints, for sure. Those who wanted to stay awake late were annoyed at those who wanted to sleep "early" (before 1 am), and vice versa.

But at the end they all seem to agree. This is perfect! The food is excellent, the opponents seem to be overrated and are at an appropriate level, there are plenty grandmasters to watch and even girls.

The social aspect, of course, is very important. The Russians seem to flock there like Arabs flock to Mekka, once a year. And so do we. You certainly won't be lonely in Cappelle la Grande. Although the centre consist mainly of a big church and a big conference centre.

We'll be back next year, for sure! But then with another tour leader.