Varsity Match Report

by Philip Best

After a successful year in the SCCU, and victories in the Dragons and Freshers' Matches, hopes were high that this might be CUCC's year. Not that the Oxford top boards were any weaker than recent years (they fielded an IM on board one), but the lower boards looked in our favour.

Preparation for the match proved difficult as Oxford decided to break with convention and declare their team in alphabetical order, whilst guesses at the board order were hampered by the presence of unknown names like 'Sergey Malichenki' and 'Vladishev Flek' in the side. Any preparation that was done was wasted anyhow, because we arrived at the RAC Club on the morning of Saturday 5th March, to find that the two Oxford players mentioned above had not even made it to the venue, and that they would be substituted by their President and Reserve (of roughly equal rating to the missing players). A rather extravagant way of avoiding being theory–hacked I feel.

After a keenly contested sandwich–eating competition, the real business of the day got underway with the toss. This went in Oxford's favour, and they chose White on odd, much to the dismay of seven of the Cambridge players who now ended up with the wrong colour. "And I thought our President was a prize tosser" was Eddie's response to this turn of events.

Play got underway, and it was again Eddie who hit the headlines first, with a stunning TN in the French Defence. The first twelve moves of the game went as follows:

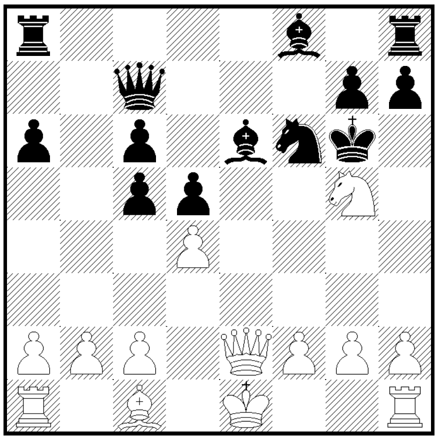
□ **Tim Dickinson**
■ **Ed Holland**
Varsity Match, Board Five

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 c5 4 e×d5 e×d5 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 ♗b5 a6 7 ♗×c6 b×c6 8 ♘e5 ♕c7 9 ♕e2 ♗e6 10 ♘df3 ♘f6 11 ♘×f7 ♔×f7 12 ♘g5+ ♔g6

(see diagram at the top of next column)

At which point Ed declared "I think it's the safest place for it."

On the other boards, Andy Mendelson gained an early initiative on board six, whilst Andy Jones looked to have the worse of his position on board two. The rest looked fairly level or slightly down except for board seven.



Here Ben won a pawn early on with the following opening:

□ **Alex Lewis**
■ **Ben Hague**
Varsity Match, Board Seven

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗b4 5 e5 h6 6 ♗d2 ♗×c3 7 b×c3 ♘e4 8 ♗d3 ♘×d2 9 ♕×d2 c5 10 f4

More common is 10 dxc5

10…♘c6 11 ♘f3 ♕a5 12 ♗e2 b6 13 c4 d×c4 14 ♕×a5 ♘×a5 15 d×c5 b×c5

Extra pawn, albeit doubled and isolated! The game continued:

16 ♖b1 ♗a6 17 ♔f2 ♔e7 18 ♔e3 ♖hd8 19 c3 ♖ab8 20 ♘d2 f5 21 ♖hd1 ♖b6 22 h3 ♖db8 23 g3 ♗b5 24 ♖e1 ♗a6 25 ♖ed1

At this point, Ben approached the President and enquired of him whether the team position permitted taking a draw. The President pointed out that only Andy Mendelson was looking to be in control with both Andy Jones and Eddie in trouble, so if he had any chance of winning he had to give it his best shot. Ben returned to the board and offered a draw five minutes later. His claim that there were no winning plans was refuted by an analysis of lines following 25…Rb2.

Anyway, we were off the mark.

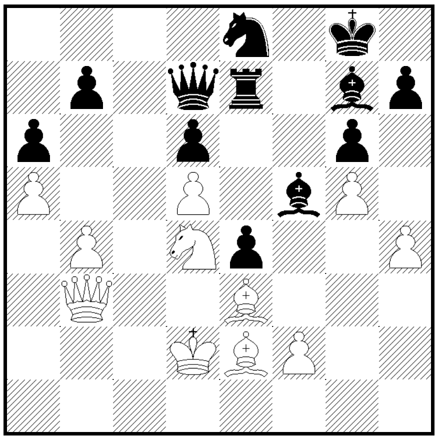
The next game to finish was, surprisingly, Eddie's. Given the position after twelve moves, it was not surprising that this game finished quickly. What was surprising was that Ed won it. After consolidating has position, he carried out a tactical coup to remove one of his opponent's rooks from the board. Perhaps the King of Sweden was right, and a good army should be led from the front.

This victory seemed to spur the team on, as within five minutes Andy Mendelson cleaned up, winning Cambridge Best Game Prize in the process (See game below this article — notes by Andy M.). Jon Hastings who had slowly turned a slightly worse position into a slightly better one, tightened the screw and took his game into a trivially won ending. On the ladies board, Emilia played well, and despite all Heidi's efforts her position remained solid. If anything, as they agreed the draw she had slightly the better of the chances.

And so Cambridge opened up a 4–1 lead, and just half–a–point more was needed for victory. It wasn't all good news though. As the time control approached, Andy Hon found his position slowly slipping away as Dharshan pushed forwards. Indeed, Dharshan won the Oxford Best Game prize for this effort.

□ **Dharshan Kumaran (IM)**
■ **Andrew Hon**
Varsity Match, Board One

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♗e2 O–O 6 ♗e3 e5 7 d5 c6 8 g4 c×d5 9 c×d5 ♘bd7 10 g5 ♘e8 11 ♘f3 f5 12 b4 ♖f7 13 h4 ♘b6 14 ♕b3 f×e4 15 ♘d2 ♗d7 16 a4 ♘c8 17 ♘d×e4 ♘e7 18 ♘g3 ♘f5 19 ♘×f5 ♗×f5 20 ♖c1 e4 21 ♘b5 a6 22 ♘d4 ♖c8 23 ♔d2 ♖×c1 24 ♖×c1 ♖e7 25 a5 ♕d7



26 ♘e6 ♖×e6 27 d×e6 ♗×e6 28 ♗g4! d5 29 ♗×e6 ♕×e6 30 ♖c5 ♔h8 31 ♕×d5 ♕e7 32 ♗d4 1–0

On board three Nick (presumably realising that Andy had now set a new *'Tosser Standard'* by achieving a Varsity score of 0/3, and that he also could attain that standard with a little effort) also dropped a pawn and position during time trouble. So, Cambridge hopes depended upon Andy Jones on board two. Here, the state of play was that Jim Cavendish had managed to pick up material out of the opening, but in doing so had used all but two minutes on his clock, with twenty moves to go to the time control. Andy proceeded to complicate the position, and then set up a nice cheapo strategy which Slim Jim duly fell for, giving back the material with interest. In the interests of the team, Andy quickly agreed a draw at this point, and the Pugh Cup would be on the train to Cambridge that evening.

The results in full were:

Andrew Hon	0–1	Dharshan Kumaran
Andrew Jones	½–½	Jim Cavendish
Nick Jakubovics	0–1	Mike Gough
Jon Hastings	1–0	Ed Newman
Ed Holland	1–0	Tim Dickinson
Andrew Mendelson	1–0	Richard Penn
Benjamin Hague	½–½	Alex Lewis
Emilia Holland	½–½	Heidi Heron

And so on to the dinner, kindly provided by our sponsors, Watson, Farley and Williams. As usual, the alcohol flowed freely, and the meal was followed by speeches. The Oxford President somehow managed to explain the absence of two of his players as being due to a computer spell-check error. The Cambridge President was rather more adventurous, and decided to explain to the gathered company the importance of the effect of testosterone levels on chess performance. Pointing out that the eventual winner of a game tended to have a higher *pre*–match testosterone level than their opponent (as explained in the peppermint *Dragon*), he concluded by suggesting this as a possible explanation of the Cambridge victory. Fortunately even Sir Stuart and Lady Milner-Barry were amused.

Other speeches were also made. Ray Keene gave the same speech that he's given for the past five years, which I shan't repeat; firstly for the benefit of all those going to next year's match, and secondly because it wasn't particularly amusing anyway. Ed stood up and pointed out that last year he had thanked the Oxford team for turning up, but unfortunately this year he couldn't do that. Dharshan stood up and nearly fell over. He was, however, just conscious enough to play (and beat) our resevre, Mark Tan, after the meal, politely encouraging Mark to keep moving quickly every time he paused for thought.

And so to the journey home, where one member of our party (who's name, for the sake of their reputation, will be mentioned neither here, nor indeed for the remainder of the article) decided that the interior of the train needed redecorating. Meanwhile, on being told that it was his responsibility to write the Varsity report (hmmm, he seems to have failed on that score!) and that quotes were always good, Mark got out pen and paper to scribble down anything applicable. This, of course, led to a huge number of quotes but very little that would be printable.

Emilia, being rather more sober than her brother Eddie, quite sensibly distanced herself from us during the journey. Messrs Hague and Jakubovics then took the opportunity to quiz Jon on his love life, but no comment was forthcoming. Andy Mendelson was running around with his camera taking embarrassing photos, which the editors have decided not to print. I was feeling nervous about a rather valuable trophy that was currently my responsibility.

Fortunately, the trophy had a safe journey to Cambridge, and indeed all other major disasters were also averted when Ben honourably declared "Plan" upon tying Andy Hon's shoelaces to the train seat.

And so a successful day drew to a close.

□ **Andrew Mendelson**
■ **Richard Penn**
Varsity Match, Board Six

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♗g5 ♘e4 5 ♗f4

A rather innocuous continuation, which has the advantage of obscurity. An adventurous alternative is 5 cxd5 Nxg5 6 h4.

5…♘×c3 6 b×c3 ♗g7 7 e3 c5

7…dxc4 8 Bxc4 Nd7 is interesting, angling for …Nb6-d5 or …e5. For example 9 Nf3?! Nb6 10 Bb3 Nd5 forces the exchange of White's light-squared bishop.

8 ♘f3 ♘c6 9 ♖b1 c×d4

9…O-O is better, maintaining the tension in the centre.

10 c×d4 ♕a5+ 11 ♕d2 ♕×d2+ 12 ♔×d2 d×c4 13 ♗×c4 b6??

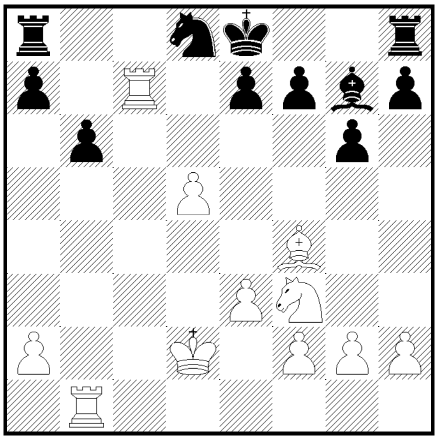
Black seeks to rid himself of his b–pawn problem, but this is disastrous. 13…O-O is far better, but White is still well on top after 14 Rhc1; Black's passive opening play has been an abject failure.

14 ♗b5 ♗d7 15 ♖hc1 ♘d8

Forced. 15…Rc8?? 16 d5!

16 ♗×d7+ ♔×d7 17 ♖c7+ ♔e8 18 d5!

Bottling up the knight and deciding the game – Black can hardly move a piece.



18…f6 19 ♖bc1!

19 d6 looks crushing, but Black has 19...e5.

A) 20 Re7+ Kf8 21 Bg3 Nf7 22 Rc1 Nxd6 23 R1c7 Nf5 leaves White with the problem of how to recycle the knight and bishop.

B) 20 Rxg7 Nf7! 21 Bg3 (*21 Bh6 Nxh6 22 Rc1 Nf5 23 Rgc7 Nxd6 covers c8)* 21…Kf8; 22 Rxf7 Kxf7 allows Black to round up the d–pawn.

19…♖g8 20 ♘d4 f5

I was hoping for 20…Kf7 21 d6 Bf8 22 dxe7 Bxe7 23 Rxe7+! Kxe7 24 Rc7+ Ke8 25 Bd6 Nf7 26 Re7+ Kd8 (26…Kf8 27 Ne6 mate) 27 Nc6+ Kc8 28 Rc7 mate.

21 ♘e6 ♗f6

21…Nxe6 22 dxe6 is obviously terminal, but now White liquidates into a winning ending.

22 ♖c8 ♖×c8 23 ♖×c8 ♔d7 24 ♖c7+ ♔e8 25 ♘×d8 ♔×d8 26 ♖×a7 ♖g7 27 ♗c7+ ♔c8 28 ♗×b6

And White converted the ending 20 moves later.

This straightforward win captured the Best Game prize, which doesn't say terribly much for the rest of the team. However, the importance of this game should not be underestimated, as the sight of their captain getting mangled straight out of the opening so dispirited the rest of the Oxford team that they could only put up token resistance, and they were put to the sword by the rampaging Cambridge barbarian hordes (actually, Ben only drew). I won't be here next year to provide inspiration, so let me take this opportunity to wish the team well for future Oxbridge encounters, and to thank WFW for the cool venue, the booze and the opportunity to meet Raymond Keene, my favourite author.