

World Universities Chess Championships 2010 - Zurich

Co-written by Hannah Dale and Sarah Hegarty



Report by Hannah Dale

The illustrated London News in 1851 contained the following descriptions of a chess tournament in Lincolnshire: “There was a company of ladies who appeared to understand the moves and excited general admiration even from veterans of the other sex...” The same could be said of the World University chess championships in Zurich, where 29 women were taking part in their separate section, playing alongside 58 men, from 21 countries. Women’s chess, today, however, has grown tremendously and Zurich saw some of the best females in the world competing.

Each country was invited to enter up to 5 men and 3 women; so whilst each player was competing as an individual, they were also representing their country’s team. Only the top 3 results counted each round, but this had to include one female result.

The team consisted of FM Peter Poobalasingam, 20, studying Maths at Bath University, rated 2332, Vedantha Kumar, 20, studying Philosophy at Cambridge University, rated 1983, Sarah Hegarty, 21 years old, studying Chemistry and Law at Bristol University, rated 2084 and Hannah Dale, 19, studying English Literature at Exeter University, rated 1779. The team’s manager was IM Lorin D’Costa, 26 years old, and now a full time chess coach.

Sat 4th September

Team Great Britain had an early start, leaving for Zurich from London Gatwick 6:35am. The flight time meant an early start for the whole team. Travelling from Lincoln, it meant travelling throughout the night for myself!

Zurich is famous for its incredibly punctual transport system. The airport had a screens informing travelers how long it would take until the next tram arrived; down to the second! The team were met at the airport by their own personally assigned guide, Liyu Wang; a Chinese student doing a PHD at the university of Zurich. Thankfully there were no rounds on the Saturday, so the whole team slept as soon as they arrived at Zurich's one and only Youth Hostel which is extremely well renowned. The accommodation was very nice. I shared a room with Sarah, which was particularly nice considering we have known each other since childhood, and even went to the same junior school together as well as playing in the same chess team when we were very young. We were given a comfortably spaced en-suite room, with a bunk bed as well as two single beds. This was perfect space for two people, but would have definitely been a squash holding four people! The boys, however, did not have the luxury of an en-suite and were provided with lockers to store their clothes in! Lorin was staying in Ibis Hotel with the other team managers. We all then spent the evening preparing for our first round games, as well as stocking up on food supplies from the local supermarket as nearly all the shops in Zurich close on a Sunday. A welcoming highlight of the day was receiving a free 'goody bag' from the Swiss Federation, containing a t-shirt, a Swiss pen knife, a personalized WUUC pen and chocolates.

Sun 5th Sep

Met by our guide at promptly 8:32, we were taken on a tram to a venue near the university, for the official opening ceremony. 15 participants gathered together and the players from each country entered in procession, holding their countries flag. Various musical performances followed as well as an interpretive chess dance! The ceremony was concluded by a wine reception, where the team celebrated Lorin's 26th birthday. The speeches emphasized chess as a game requiring great concentration, determination, intellect and physical fitness; therefore making it a sport.

The afternoon saw the tournament kick off with round one at 2pm, where Sarah lost her first game as Black against the very strong, WGM Stojanovic Andjelija (2337) from Serbia. I was given a half point bye, as I am a Christian and prefer not to play on Sundays for religious reasons.

The boys both scored excellent draws as Black; Peter against IM Papin Vasily (2534) from Russia and Vedantha against FM Ahmadinia Ebrahim (2414) from Iran.

The tournament conditions are very luxurious with free bottles of water and free coffee for all players. There is also a balcony for spectators to watch the games. Unlike in many British tournaments, photos were allowed to be taken right throughout the games, so long as they were not noisy in doing so. Video recording also took place, especially amongst the top games.

Mon 6th Sep

Today was the first full day with both a morning and an afternoon round. Lunch was served for all participants very near the tournament hall so players stayed in the same place all day.

Round 2 was a tough game for me, playing against one of the tournaments top seeds, a Mongolian WGM, Batchimeg Tuvshintugs, rated 2333. My opponent played extremely quickly, and I think I was possible one of the first to lose! Sarah, however stormed an attack and won as white against WCM Lin Dwijavanti Kadek, rated 1889 from Indonesia.



Hegarty - Kadek.pgn

Our other team results were promising as Peter won convincingly as white against IM Malkhaz Sulashvili rated 2500 from Georgia. Vedantha lost as white against Bavarsaikham Gundavaa rated 2460.

Round 3, in the afternoon, saw a good draw for myself against Pauline Van Nies (2167) from Netherlands; a player almost 400 points above me! Being the lowest graded player in the tournament (apart from two ungraded players from Sri Lanka), I wasn't really expecting much, so this result was a real bonus. The game was extremely complex right up until the very end, when we both got down to less than 1 minute left on the clock with an incredibly complicated endgame to play, so agreed a draw. Sarah had the unlucky pairing against the women's top seed, Batkhuyug Mungutuul (2412) from Mongolia, who had unexpectedly lost her second round game and was on 1 out of 2. Sarah lost, but not without a well fought fight.



Dale - Van Nies.pgn

Elsewhere, Vedantha managed an incredible win involving a queen sacrifice against Soozankar Amohammed (2299) from Iran and Peter lost as Black against GM Anuar Ismagambetov (2492) from Kazakhstan.

The time limits; although they appear to be a long time, were noticeably very quick to all players; many of whom commented on the matter as something they would change given the chance to change anything about the tournament.

Each of us were able to play through our games with Lorin afterwards which helped prepare us for the next round and take note of where we went wrong in order to improve.

Tue 7th Sep

Today there was just one round in the afternoon, which gave the team the morning to prepare. Much to our disappointment, Sarah and I were paired against each other! Neither of us had seen this coming and we were particularly annoyed after having prepared openings together up until this point, so we knew what each other played. Nonetheless, we decided to play the game as though we weren't from the same team; and after a well fought game on both sides, Sarah emerged victorious out of a sharp variation of the Winawer Variation in the French Defense.



Hegarty - Dale.pgn

Sarah's win against me was the only win for Great Britain, as the boys both lost to titled players; Peter, as white against GM Jan Markos (2566) from Slovakia, and Vedantha as white against IM Milos Roganovic (2497) from Serbia.

In the evening our team took a walk down to Lake Zurich; which lit up at nighttime, was particularly beautiful. It is apparently home to the pop star Tina Turner.

Wed 8th Sep

Today was back to two rounds, and players at this stage were beginning to feel tiredness and exhaustion kick in. Nonetheless, for round 5, I scored my first win of the tournament playing an English Defense as white against L.G.A. Liyanagedara (1844) from Sri Lanka. This gave me great confidence and it was nice to know that despite being the lowest rated player, that I could still beat players there.



Dale - Liyanagedara.pgn

Sarah lost a sharp game with the accelerated Dragon to Irene Kharisma Sukandar (2372) from Indonesia.

Amongst the boys, Peter won his game as Black against Marijn Otte (2264) from the Netherlands and Vedantha lost his game as white against one of Switzerland's prodigies, FM Felix Hindermann (2323)

Round 6, in the afternoon, saw results from everyone apart from myself, so a great victory for Great Britain. Sarah's win as white against Ashanti Rajapaksha from Sri Lanka, brings her up to a very decent score of 3/6. My game, however, did not go so well. Playing against Indonesia's Baig Vina Lestari (2177), I miscalculated a simple combination in time trouble, which lost me the exchange for no compensation.

During the rounds there was opportunity to get to know some of the other competitors from other countries. One girl I got to know quite well was Ana Ferreira from Portugal. She had also lost one of her games, and it was noticed by several people that no matter if she won or lost she always had a great big smile on her face. When asked about it, she simply told me "Well, it's better than crying, isn't it?" – a good motto for all players I think!

Thurs 9th Sep

Today was the well deserved and well sought after rest day, in which all chess players and their team managers were taken by coach on an excursion to Luzern. The weather was perfect, and I have never seen a more beautiful lake! We were also able to take a boat ride across the lake to Mount Rigi, which went up most of the way by train and the rest on foot. The views were incredible and I have never seen chess players use their cameras quite so much!

In the evening, Vedantha and myself chose to take part in the Blitz tournament; a tournament where each player has just 5 minutes each to play their game – very different from the serious games where additional time increment is a given. We both scored 4/9 with some good wins along the way. The tournament was opened up to players of all ages, so many players took part from the local area.



Report by Sarah Hegarty

Friday 10th September

Friday was a long day due to the double round but luckily we had a lovely rest day the day before so we were refreshed and prepared for some tough battles. I was playing Sandra Djukic (2198) with the white pieces; this was a good paring because so far in the tournament I had played much higher rated players with black and much lower rated players with white. I had not played someone of a similar rating and Sandra was only a hundred points higher. I had spent Thursday night preparing an open Sicilian and my preparation was a success. I had a lovely position and managed to go two pawns ahead where simple chess would have secured a win. However, I thought I saw a mating net which involved sacrificing some pawns but it did not work. This left me very annoyed and I had to hold a slightly worse endgame with 30 seconds per move. This is tough when a few minutes before I was completely winning but playing competitive chess has taught me that you have to focus on the present and not dwell on the past.

Hannah played a French defence against Yordanka Naydenova (1924). Her opponent managed an early attack which Hannah managed to diffuse but she later lost in the endgame after a long fight.

Peter had prepared an interesting line of the Gruenfeld and was doing very well against Marian Jurcik (2466), a strong International Master. Unfortunately he made one slip and was unable to hold the draw.

Vedantha had black against Velislav Kukov (2395) and got a lovely attack but ultimately his piece sacrifice was insufficient and he eventually lost.

After our mornings games we rushed to lunch and found a few spare minutes to look up our opponents on Lorin's laptop. We drank some coffee and then there was barely time to talk before round eight commenced. I was black against Nina Hemmatizadeh and I managed to play an improved version of my round one Gruenfeld. I had an advantage throughout the game but I was unable to convert it into a win. I failed to win a tough rook and pawn endgame because she only had one weakness and she defended very well so it was a draw but I only agreed a draw after I gave her every opportunity to make a mistake! I was a little disappointed because both of Friday's games I should have won but I can only learn from my mistakes.

Hannah's afternoon game saw a lovely win against Himeshi.De-Silva of Sri Lanka. Hannah launched a nice attack which her opponent was unable to defend. To complement Hannah's result Peter had a nice win against International Master R.Panjawani. It was a tactical finish by Peter and it meant he secured his International Master norm regardless of round nine. A fine achievement! His nice combination can be attributed to the tactics sessions we were all doing using our favourite 'bear' puzzle book. Vedantha had a bye in round eight.

After a very long day we had dinner and then headed straight back to the youth hostel and got some sleep ready for the final round on Saturday morning.

Saturday 11th September

In round nine Hannah was playing her Portuguese friend Ana Ferreira 1816 and she drew in an exchanged French defence. I was playing Caetano Garcia and in true Sarah style all I wanted to do was win. I was better and then the position got complicated and we were both very low on time. In an epic time scramble my opponent emerged from the complications winning. I still had perpetual checks but I still thought I could win. Unfortunately I was a lot worse at that stage and went on to lose which was quite upsetting especially because I played well but tried too hard to win. It hurts a lot at the time but I think in the long run it makes one stronger. Unfortunately the boys lost too so was not a great finish for team Great Britain but Peter Poobalasingam secured his second IM norm which was an outstanding achievement.

After the disappointments of the last round had faded slightly we attended the closing ceremony. Unfortunately Hannah had gone home but the rest of us were present. A lot of effort and organization had gone into the ceremony. We saw some excellent performances including world class breakdancers! Some countries contributed pieces and Vedantha Kumar did Great Britain proud by singing us all a song! The food was delicious and the organization could not have been better. After the ceremony we headed to a club they had hired out with free drinks throughout the night. This was a great finish to the tournament allowing all countries to socialise and enjoy themselves having worked so hard over the chessboard!

Sunday 12th September

Sunday saw team Great Britain returning from sunny Zurich to rainy England! The journey back went smoothly and one thing for sure was that we all had an excellent time! We would like to thank Alex Holwaczak for making the trip possible and Lorin D'Costa for being our 'team manager'. This is certainly one of the best trips I have been on due to the outstanding organization of the Swiss federation. On top of

that it was great to compete with the top university chess players in the world and make some good friends!

