

Magic Moulthun Meets Shining Shirov **A Report on the 2009 Surfers Paradise Open** *by DOP Charles Zworestine*

Well, I told everyone in my report on this event last year that variety is the spice of life; so tournament organiser Amir Karibasic decided to add even more variety this year! One element of this was forced on him, as unlike last year he had no public holiday and so only two playing days. This meant he had to run the event at the standard weekender time controls of 60 minutes plus 10 seconds per move from the start (Fischer) – a 6 round event, just like last year. But why only 6 rounds, when he could easily have fitted in 7 at this time control? Well, that was the other element of variety as compared to last year – only this one was rather more exciting...

For the 2008 event, Super GM Alexei Shirov judged the brilliancy prize: a nice feature of the event, which understandably proved very popular. But this time, both Amir and Alexei did substantially better: Alexei showed up in person! Yes, he made the long trip to Australia (his second visit, after the 2000 Olympics in Sydney where he played an exhibition game against Vishy Anand) to give a talk on the Saturday night and a simul on the Sunday afternoon. This was why there were only 6 rounds (4 on the Saturday, 2 on the Sunday): to allow time for the Shirov simul. I think most players agreed that this was a more enjoyable use of their time...

It was good for me too; getting to meet Shirov, a most charming and personable man, and seeing some high standard chess made a welcome change, just like last year, from my hectic university teaching commitments! (Remind me not to take on four courses next term)... Staying with Sam Grigg's family was another change, and I can only thank them for their wonderful hospitality; they breed them warm and friendly on the Gold Coast! So not having to worry about practicalities, I could enjoy Amir's 3 tournaments: the 6 round Open and Under 1600 events on both days, and the 6 round "fun tournament" on the Sunday. While not quite as strong as last year, the Open event still featured our latest GM, David Smerdon, as top seed; an IM, fourth seeded Leonid Sandler; a WIM, fifth seed Anastasia Sorokina; and two FMs, second seed Vlad Smirnov and young Gene Nakauchi. Add to this a former Australian Junior Champion, third seed Moulthun Ly, and we knew were in for a fun event! Let's see how it all went...

After the dust had cleared, it turned out there were no upsets in the Open event in Round 1; but if you had been watching what I saw, you would have been as amazed at that fact as I was! It all began with Smurf, who had an almighty struggle against Tony Weller after failing to really refute Tony's interesting piece sacrifice; he was fortunate to win in the end after Tony walked into a mate in two in mutual time pressure. (See game below). Vlad Smirnov was also lucky to beat Alex Stahnke, misplaying his ending after swapping queens on move 3; at one stage his position looked inferior to me, but then he fought back in typical fashion to end up a convincing winner in a rook ending a pawn up. Ben Lazarus was the other lucky winner, as 8 year old Anton Smirnov made it a very interesting round for the Smirnov family! Trying to grind the youngster down in a rook, knight and opposite coloured bishop ending a pawn up, Ben stunned us all by blundering a knight in time pressure just when he looked to be making progress; he was fortunate that the inexperienced Anton blundered another pawn, then sacrificed the piece back to swap into a lost king and pawn ending where he lost his last pawn – a rook pawn too!

Smerdon (2535) - Weller (1754), 2009 Surfers Paradise Open Round 1, Board 1 26/09/2009
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.c3 Nf6 4.e5 Nd5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 Nc6 7.Bc4 Nb6 8.Bd3 d5 9.Nc3 Be7 10.a3 a5 11.Bc2 Bd7 12.h4 Rc8 13.Rh3 f5 14.Bg5 h6 15.Bc1 Na7 16.Bd3 Nc4 17.Ne2 a4 18.Rg3 g5 19.Nh2 Qb6 20.Rb1 Nb5 21.Bc2 Nxd4 22.Nxd4 Bc5 23.b3 Nxa3 24.Bxa3 Bxd4 25.bxa4 Bxf2+ 26.Kf1 Qa7 27.Rxb7 Qxb7 28.Kxf2 Qb6+ 29.Kf1 Rc4 30.Rb3 Qa6 31.Bd3 Rf4+ 32.Nf3 Qa7 33.Qc1 Kf7 34.Bb5 Rc8 35.Qd2 Bxb5+ 36.axb5 Qa4 37.Rc3 Rxc3 38.Qxc3 Qd1+ 39.Kf2 g4 40.Qc7+ Kg6 41.h5+ Kxh5 42.Qf7# 1-0

No upsets in the first round of the Under 1600 event either, except for Axel Stahnke losing to rising junior Kees Huband-Lint. Meanwhile Kees' coach, Sam Grigg, tried to bore Smurf to death by swapping pieces on top board of the Open event in Round 2! As usual, this failed; David showing GM technique to convert a positional advantage of good knight vs bad bishop. Vlad Smirnov again played an eventful game on Board 2, eventually beating Jonas Muller in a mutual time scramble from a double edged position with three minor pieces against Jonas' rook and bishop – and loose pawns all over the board! Anastasia Sorokina fought back from a tough endgame the exchange for a pawn down to finally trump Bruce Williams in time pressure – then promptly took a Round 3 bye with Leonid Sandler to watch his beloved St. Kilda against Geelong in the AFL grand final! (Geelong won). Upsets saw Yi Liu recover from a poor opening to win two pieces for a rook and beat Gene Nakauchi; Abbie Kanagarajah win a long time scramble against Daniel Ford; Brent Winston stun Mark Stokes; and Ryan Louie do likewise to Nicholas Deen-Cowell. The top two boards of the Under 1600 were also upsets, draws by William Bay and Charlie Guo against Hackenschmidt-Uecker and Craig Stewart respectively; while further upsets saw Joe Delmastro beat Kai Tan, and Harry Hughes defeat Mark Cervenjak.

Smurf kept rolling on in Round 3, accounting for Justin Tan when his knight and rook got in to the enemy position and cleaned up! Vlad Smirnov was not so lucky, overlooking tactics to find himself splattered in an upset lost to Phachara Wongwichit (see game below). Magic Moulthun won a positional game against Emma Guo, taking advantage of his good knight vs her bad bishop in a locked position; while Vinod Kumar won an even longer struggle to upset Ben Lazarus, his queen and extra pawns eventually triumphing against Ben's two rooks. Yi Liu had a quick draw with Sam Grigg, while Sebastian Jule had a rather longer one against David Spuler... The Under 1600 event saw more upsets, with Alex O'Flynn being the latest victim of another underrated junior in Harry Hughes. With Joe Delmastro taking advantage of a generous knight sacrifice in a tricky bishop vs knight ending full of passed pawns to upset Craig Stewart, this left three players jointly in the lead on 3/3: Doug Williams (1533), Joe (1196) and Harry (just 806)!

Wongwichit (2055) - Smirnov (2335), 2009 Surfers Paradise Open Round 3, Board 2 26/9/09

1.e4 Nc6 2.Nc3 e6 3.d4 d5 4.Nf3 Nf6 5.e5 Ne4 6.Bd3 Bb4 7.Bd2 Bxc3 8.bxc3 Nxd2 9.Nxd2 Na5 10.Qg4 g6 11.0-0 c5 12.c4 h5 13.Qf4 g5 14.Qe3 dxc4 15.Nxc4 cxd4 16.Qe4 Nc6 17.Nd6+ Ke7 18.f4 f5 19.fxg5 Qa5 20.Qh4 Qxe5 21.Nxf5+ Kd7 22.Rae1 Qc5 23.Ng7 Kc7 24.Rf7+ Kb8 25.Nxe6 Qd6 26.Qf4 Qxf4 27.Nxf4 Nd8 28.Rf6 Nc6 29.g6 Kc7 30.Nd5+ Kd8 31.g7 1-0

So, just 4 players on 3/3 going in to Round 4 of the Open – and what was in the water on Saturday night? First Vlad Smirnov lost his second game in a row, going down in another big upset to fast rising 12 year old Yi Liu; but even this paled into insignificance compared to what happened on Board 1... In a much better position against Phachara, Grandmaster Smurf decided to sacrifice a rook, thinking he won it back via a discovered check; but in fact he only won back the exchange, so he ended up a piece down! This miscalculation proved fatal, Phachara showing good technique to go on and score a huge upset win. He was joined on 4/4 by Magic Moulthun, who attacked well to beat Vinod Kumar; while Sorokina and Sandler, clearly worn out by their AFL grand final exertions, had a very quick draw... The Under 1600 saw Joe Delmastro defeat Harry Hughes to share the lead on 4/4 with Doug Williams, who beat William Bay. Top seed Joerg Hackenschmidt-Uecker was also up there on 3.5/4 after his win over Axel Stahnke.

Round 5 saw Moulthun emerge from complications the exchange ahead to defeat Phachara and claim the outright lead on 5/5. An even more intriguing game occurred on Board 2 between Yi Liu and Anastasia Sorokina, the former turning it into a tactical battle very early on which ran 28 fascinating moves before settling into a perpetual check. (See game below). Yi thus joined a log jam of players on 4/5, which included Phachara, Smurf (beat Vinod Kumar), Sandler (who used two bishops and initiative to score a crushing attacking win over Justin Tan), Jonas Muller (upset Ben Lazarus) and Bruce Williams (beat Gene Nakauchi). The latter was a time pressure upset, Gene being attacked and going down after failing to find the best defense when short of time.

Liu, Y (1835) - Sorokina, A (2172), 2009 Surfers Paradise Open Round 5, Board 2 27/09/09

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bf4 e5 8.Nd5 Nxd5 9.exd5 Ne7 10.Bxe5 dxe5 11.d6 Qa5+ 12.c3 Nf5 13.b4 Qb6 14.Nc7+ Kd8 15.Nxa8 Qc6 16.c4 Bxd6 17.Be2 Nd4 18.0-0 b6 19.c5 Bb7 20.Bf3 Nxf3+ 21.gxf3 bxc5 22.bxc5 Qxc5 23.Rb1 e4 24.Rxb7 Qg5+ 25.Kh1 Qf4 26.Rb8+ Ke7 27.Qxd6+ Kxd6 28.Rxh8 ½-½

The above draw meant an ideal last round matchup between Smurf and Magic Moulthun to see if Smurf could catch MM for equal first; and this the GM duly did, winning another interesting game where his queen and two extra pawns proved too powerful for Moulthun's three minor pieces. This meant a three way tie for first on 5/6 after Phachara converted pressure and a time advantage into an extra piece and the full point against Bruce Williams. Leonid Sandler and Yi Li failed to join them, Leonid drawing early with Jonas Muller after failing to secure an opening advantage as White; and Yi mistakenly swapping from a drawish looking rook ending into a lost king and pawn ending to go down to George Lester. (Leonid later claimed that all this meant he had made the least number of moves of all the players in the event; must mean his moves were very powerful, he said...). Vlad Smirnov finally made something of his event with a win against Anastasia Sorokina; while upsets in the time scramble at the end were scored by Brodie McClymont over Gene Nakauchi, and Ryan Stevens over Vinod Kumar.

And no, I have not forgotten about the Under 1600 event! Round 5 saw Doug Williams finally end Joe Delmastro's run to claim the outright lead on 5/5; but the top seed was breathing down his neck on 4.5/5 after winning a piece to beat Harry Hughes. Alex O'Flynn was coming back into contention too after his win over Joe Kingston; while Peter Haron upset Mark Cervenjak... The final round then saw the cream come to the top, our top seed Joerg entering a rook ending a pawn up and duly converting to beat Doug Williams and take out first prize on 5.5/6. Alex O'Flynn had a tougher fight against Joe Delmastro, his rook and two minor pieces eventually beating Joe's queen. This left Alex in equal second place with Doug on 5/6; while the upset win by Kees Huband-Lint over Kingston snared him a share of the Under 1200 prize with Delmastro.

The fun event on the Sunday attracted 22 players, and was won by Curtis Jack on 5.5/6. Second place was shared on 4.5/6 by Jake Pyper and Andrew Peck. It was nice to see two adults playing in this Under 1000 event (Andrew was one of them), meant to be tailor made "for parents and beginners" – of course there were more junior "beginners" than parents! There were many more draws than you might expect in such an event; but then again, if you must stalemate with three extra queens, I guess that is not too surprising... This is why it was called a beginner's event! More importantly, everyone did have fun in this event; that of course was its main purpose...

So ended another successful Surfers Paradise event, except for the one more exceptional feature this year: 26 brave souls facing up to Alexei Shirov for their chance at simul glory! Apart from the usual crop of youngsters, this included star Gold Coast organiser Graeme Gardiner – it was the first time many of us had ever seen him actually play chess... A respectful silence engulfed the playing hall as Shirov walked around; and it was amazing to see how aggressively he attacked on practically every board! On one board, he sacrificed his queen (admittedly for rook and bishop) to force a very pretty mate or win it back with interest; on several other boards, he sacrificed the exchange; and sometimes this was even in queenless endgames! He was trying to create something pretty on almost every board; it was incredible to watch...

Anton Smirnov was first to fall; Shirov obviously knows the dangers up and coming 8 year olds can pose, so he splattered him with a crushing attack on his king! He later praised both Anton and Justin Tan, "for knowing when to resign"... In the end, out of 25 boards, Shirov won 24, drawing with another junior in Daniel Lapitan after Daniel calmly defended well in a position where many club players would have panicked. Amin Fazel also came close, as Shirov admitted afterwards he thought about offering a draw in their game. Amin played for a win but lost in the end, as it was the Super GM who better handled the pinning tactics...

Unfortunately I had to leave before all games were over; but fortunately, Nenad Chelebichanin (thanks Nenad) sent me a report (under the heading “Shirov simul: fire on many boards”) on some of the other games! Ivan Zelich's game was the last to finish, and was most attractive and interesting for the spectators. Shirov sacrificed his queen for a mating attack; Zelich defended well, but found his lone black queen was no match for a team of White pieces. Against a player rated more than 2100 points higher, Zelich still played much better than his 607 Queensland junior rating would suggest... In another good game against Michael Van Pelt, Shirov sacrificed the exchange for positional compensation on the queenside and converted it into a win, but said Michael had a very good position in the middle game... Some players even tried to use Shirov's own weapons against him; Graeme Gardiner for example sacrificed the exchange, but his attempt to storm the White king was too slow. Cameron De Vere did manage to attack the White king; but Shirov defended well, then counterattacked and better handled the complications.

Shirov also gave a lecture on Saturday night, where he first presented a game of his as Black in the complicated Dragon variation of the Sicilian Defense. He used this to demonstrate how top players prepare for a game, trying to find favourable transpositions to improve on the standard positions arising from the opening. Then he showed something completely different: how he thought at the board in a game where his position was not good, and managed to win the game. Answering questions, he then revealed how he came up with his “most amazing move”, Bh3; his g4 invention in a well known opening variation. In short: learn from your losses, Ribka and your intuition!

Open Prizes: = 1st Moulthun Ly, Phachara Wongwichit, David Smerdon 5/6; = 4th Leonid Sandler, Jonas Muller, George Lester (the latter two = 1st Under 2000) 4.5/6; = 5th (and all = 3rd Under 2000 except the first two) Vladimir Smirnov, Ben Lazarus, Yi Liu, Brodie McClymont, Ian Rout, Ryan Stevens, Justin Tan, Bruce Williams 4/6.

Under 1600 Prizes: 1st Joerg Hackenschmidt-Uecker 5.5/6; = 2nd Doug Williams, Alex O’Flynn 5/6; 4th Craig Stewart 4.5/6; = 5th Axel Stahnke, Mark Cervenjok 4/6; = 1st Under 1200 Joe Delmastro, Kees Huband-Lint 4/6.

Under 1000 (Fun Section) Prizes: 1st Curtis Jack 5.5/6; = 2nd Jake Pyper, Andrew Peck 4.5/6; = Best Junior (latter two also = Best Female) Alex Jack, Melanie Karibasic, Shelley Xing 4/6.