

PRESS RELEASE

2017 London Chess Classic: The Players



		LONDON CHESS CLASSIC	
		<i>Player Roster #GrandChessTour</i>	
	NOR GM MAGNUS CARLSEN	2867	(URS)
	USA GM HIKARU NAKAMURA	2803	(URS)
	ARM GM LEVON ARONIAN	2803	(URS)
	FRA GM MAXIME VACHIER-LAGRAVE	2802	(URS)
	USA GM WESLEY SO	2789	(URS)
	RUS GM SERGEY KARJAKIN	2783	(URS)
	USA GM FABIANO CARUANA	2780	(URS)
	IND GM VISWANATHAN ANAND	2771	(URS)
	RUS GM IAN NEPOMNIACHTCHI	2768	(URS)
	ENG GM MICKEY ADAMS*	2735	(URS)

*Wildcards are not eligible for the overall GCT prizes

John Saunders reports: The ninth London Chess Classic, which kicks off at the DeepMind Google HQ on 1 December 2017 and continues at the Olympia Conference Centre from 3 to 11 December 2017, is the concluding leg of the 2017 Grand Chess Tour and features a prize fund of \$300,000. Heading a stellar field is the world champion Magnus Carlsen.

The table above shows the ten London Chess Classic competitors in order of their URS ([Universal Rating System](#)) rating.

THE PLAYERS

Magnus Carlsen (Norway)

Age: 27

URS Rating and Ranking: 2867, no. 1

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2826, no. 1

London Chess Classic last year: *did not play*

Form in 2017: Magnus Carlsen has had an up and down year, and seen his classical chess rating subside to a level it has not been at since before becoming world champion but he is currently on an upswing as he comfortably won the recent



Chess.com Isle of Man Masters ahead of a world-class field. Carlsen started the year with a score of 8/13 at the annual Tata Steel Wijk aan Zee event, leaving him a point adrift of the winner, Wesley So. In April he once again finished second behind one of his major rivals, Levon Aronian, at the Grenke Classic in Germany in April. The fifth Norway Chess super-tournament in Stavanger was the nadir of his year, and arguably his career, as he could only finish on 4/9, just half a point clear of his title match rival Sergey Karjakin, who finished last of ten, and was the only player Carlsen managed to beat.

Paris hosted the opening event of the Grand Chess Tour in June which saw Carlsen back to his best with a convincing first place in the rapid section, but the blitz event that immediately followed it was less successful, as he only managed to share fourth place behind Vachier-Lagrave, Nakamura and Caruana. This meant that he shared overall first for the two disciplines with Maxime Vachier-Lagrave but, as in the 2015 London Classic, he succeeded in edging out the French player in a play-off.

On to the similar rapid/blitz tournament in July in Leuven, Belgium, where he once again triumphed overall, though this time doing a great deal better in the blitz but not so well at rapid.

In August Carlsen played in the 5th Sinquefeld Cup in Saint Louis, Missouri, with a field differing from the one we will be seeing in London by just the wild card (Peter Svidler instead of Mickey Adams). Carlsen's form was good but not quite good enough for first place, as he was defeated by Maxime Vachier-Lagrave in the fourth round and had to be content with shared second behind the Frenchman.

In September Carlsen enrolled himself in the FIDE World Cup in Tbilisi. This was an unusual move on the part of a reigning world champion, who would normally be expected to sit out a world championship qualifier, but he probably felt his classical chess needed a thorough work-out. He looked in prime form until unseated by a tactical shot launched by Chinese GM Bu Xiangzhi in round three and found himself on an unexpectedly early flight home from the knock-out event. Still thirsting for more classical action in preparation for the final leg of the Grand Chess Tour, he became a last-minute

entry in the Chess.Com Isle of Man Masters event which was just about to start. Eschewing his usual entourage, he visited the small island in the Irish Sea with his girlfriend and proceeded to win the tournament ahead of three Grand Chess Tour rivals. This was his first triumph in a classical event for more than a year. Carlsen will be hoping that the psychological boost of this recent success will carry forward into the London Chess Classic.



Hikaru Nakamura (USA)

Age: 29 (turns 30 during the tournament)

URS Rating and Ranking: 2803, no. 2=

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2774, no. 10

London Chess Classic last year: 5/9, 3rd=

Form in 2017: Hikaru Nakamura's year started with a bang, as it had in 2015 and 2016, with victory at the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters. It took a play-off to decide the winner but Nakamura's typical self-confidence in quicker forms of the game carried him through. The Sharjah Grand Prix started only a couple of weeks later and there he was just half a point behind the winners in a tough event which did not feature many decisive results. In March he once again finished half a point behind the winners, this time at the very strong US Championship in Saint Louis. April saw him score a success at the Zurich Korchnoi event ahead of Anand, Kramnik and Gelfand. His Moscow Grand Prix experience in May was much like Sharjah – unbeaten but only one win amongst all the draws. Another plus-one score at the immensely strong Stavanger tournament put him into a creditable second equal place with Kramnik behind Aronian and ahead of the rest of the elite field. He was third in the rapid and second in the blitz at the Paris Grand Tour event, but in August only a disappointing minus two at the Sinquefeld Cup, with small solace provided by good scores in the following blitz and rapid competitions. Like the world champion, he fell at the third fence in the FIDE World Cup knock-out and proceeded to the Isle of Man, where a steadily improving tournament saw him share second with Anand behind Carlsen. Also like the world champion, Nakamura will be keen to shore up his ebbing rating and win another London title.



Levon Aronian (Armenia)

Age: 35

URS Rating and Ranking: 2803, no. 2=

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2801, no. 2

London Chess Classic last year: 4/9, 7th=

Form in 2017: Levon Aronian's 2016 ended on a downbeat, with a minus score in London, but his form has picked up in 2017 to such a degree that he is once again being talked about as the likeliest challenger to Magnus Carlsen's world title. He started steadily but not spectacularly at Wijk aan Zee with a +2 score and 3rd= place, but then came a backward step at the Sharjah Grand Prix where a long run of draws ended with a last-round loss. But the Grenke Classic in April saw him finish a point and a half clear of Carlsen and Caruana in the space of only seven rounds of chess. This was the sort of sublime tournament result that only happens once in a blue moon ... except that it happened all over again two months later at an even stronger tournament. In Stavanger in June he finished a full point ahead of a field packed with elite names, beating Carlsen in brilliant fashion and also Kramnik and Karjakin along the way. At that point in the year his performances reverted to being steady but unremarkable, in the Grand Tour rapid and blitz events in Leuven, the Geneva Grand Prix and the Sinquefeld Cup, but he once again excelled in the rapid and blitz tournaments that followed in Saint Louis. In September he completed a magnificent trio of tournament successes in 2017 by winning the FIDE World Cup in Georgia ahead of about as strong a field as has ever graced one of these gruelling knock-out events. Just to cap everything, on the weekend after his Tbilisi success, he married his long-time girlfriend Arianne Caoili in a spectacular wedding attended by Armenia's head of state. Levon Aronian already has a strong claim to being the player of the year, and he will be seeking to cement that status in London.

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (France)

Age: 27

URS Rating and Ranking: 2802, no. 4

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2794, no. 3

London Chess Classic last year: 4/9, 7th=

Form in 2017: Regular Classic watchers will recall that MVL was narrowly edged out by Magnus Carlsen in a tie for first at the 2015 London Chess Classic, and his year started similarly as he lost a play-off for first to Hikaru Nakamura at the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters. It was the same story at the Sharjah Grand Prix that followed in February as he

tied for first with Grischuk and Mamedyarov but was placed behind the Russian on head-to-head tie-break as Grischuk had previously defeated Mamedyarov. MVL finished in mid-table at the Grenke, Moscow Grand Prix and Stavanger tournaments that



followed, but made a very fine score to finish first in the blitz component of the Paris Grand Chess Tour event, including a 2-0 wipe-out of the world champion. However, the subsequent play-off to decide the overall winner of the combined competitions saw Carlsen take his revenge. MVL did well in the Leuven leg of the tour but again Carlsen was untouchable. He was one of the favourites at Dortmund but he had to be content with shared second with Fedoseev behind the surprise winner Radoslaw Wojtaszek. Then, in August, came the high point of MVL's year, and indeed his career so far – first place in the Sinquefield Cup, with wins against So, Nepomniachtchi and Carlsen. His win against Carlsen will have made up for previous near-misses and play-off disappointments against the champion. The year ended with another near-miss, however, when he reached the semi-final of the FIDE World Cup only to be eliminated by Levon Aronian in a play-off. Vachier-Lagrave will be hoping to rekindle some of his midsummer Sinquefield magic to ignite his winter visit to London.

Wesley So (USA)

Age: 24

URS Rating and Ranking: 2789, no. 7

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2788, no. 7

London Chess Classic last year: 6/9, 1st

Form in 2017: As Wesley So stood on the stage at last year's London Classic, hoisting the trophy aloft, he was already being touted as the leading contender to Magnus Carlsen's world title. There was further fulfilment of the promise of 2016 as he won his first tournament of 2017, Tata Steel Wijk aan Zee, finishing a full point clear of Carlsen. Another first place followed in March as he tied for first at the US Championship in Saint Louis and then won the play-off. Finishing second to Mamedyarov at the Gashimov Memorial in Azerbaijan in April was, for a player of his burgeoning form and rating, a blemish but only a slight one, while nine straight draws in Stavanger in June was more of a disappointment (hardly noticed at the time since the world champion had suffered a more serious melt-down). In the rapid/blitz competitions in Paris and Leuven Wesley So's sole success was in the Leuven rapid, while his blitz performances were well below par for a prospective champion. By mid-year, there was still hope of So overtaking an off-form Carlsen in the rating list but a disastrous 3/9 and joint last at the Sinquefield Cup

must have come as a cold shower. September saw a recovery as he proceeded smoothly to the semi-finals of the FIDE World Cup only to be outplayed by Ding Liren in a blitz play-off. After what has been a year of two halves, Wesley So must be hoping that a return to the scene of his 2016 triumph will help him regain his form of a year ago.



Sergey Karjakin (Russia)

Age: 27

URS Rating and Ranking: 2783, no. 9

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2765, no. 12

London Chess Classic last year: *did not play*

Form in 2017: The big moment of Sergey's Karjakin's career came in 2016 as he challenged Magnus Carlsen for the world title. He lost the match but he did well to push the champion all the way to a rapid tie-break. Right at the end of the 2016 Karjakin secured a measure of revenge by snatching the world blitz championship from Carlsen. Karjakin started 2017 by scoring a solid 7/13 at Tata Steel Wijk aan Zee, followed by a middling 4½/9 at the Gashimov Memorial in Shamkir. In June he finished half a point behind Carlsen in Stavanger but, amazingly for both of the recent world championship opponents, at the wrong end of the score table; Carlsen was a sensational next to last and Karjakin rock bottom. His form picked up slightly in the Paris and Saint Louis Grand Chess Tour events, and he once again demonstrated his ultra-quick sight of the board in the blitz competition that concluded the Saint Louis events with a resounding first place in the event that saw the return of Garry Kasparov to active play. In the lottery of the FIDE World Cup in Tbilisi, his luck was out as he was eliminated by fellow countryman Daniil Dubov in the second round. Karjakin will be making his first appearance in formal chess in England since taking part in one of the last all-play-all Hastings Premier tournaments in 2002/3 as a 12-year-old and will be looking to regain the form that carried him through the last world championship cycle.



Fabiano Caruana (USA)

Age: 25

URS Rating and Ranking: 2780, no. 11

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2794, no. 4

London Chess Classic last year: 5½/9, 2nd

Form in 2017: After his second place in the 2016 Classic, Caruana proceeded to Gibraltar as the highest rated player in the field by some distance on 2827. He proceeded smoothly to 4/5 but was then unseated by England's Nigel Short in the sixth round and thereafter couldn't quite get on terms with the leaders. His performance in the US Championship in March was marred by losses to Akobian and Zhrebukh, and again his rating suffered. He shared second with Carlsen at the Grenke Classic in Germany but a loss to Hou Yifan cost him dear. At Stavanger he was still in with an outside chance of overhauling Carlsen's dwindling rating but a sixth round loss to Anand left him on a par score. Caruana seems less confident at the quicker forms of the game and he finished last in the Paris Grand Chess Tour rapid, though doing considerably better in the blitz. There was still hope of overhauling Carlsen's rating at the Sinquefeld Cup but two losses saw him subside to a minus one score. As with some of his elite rivals, round three was the round of death in the FIDE World Cup in Tbilisi when he lost to the Russian player Evgeny Najer. He arrived in the Isle of Man with his rating now dipped just below 2800. Lady luck seemed not to be on his side when Vladimir Kramnik pulled his name out of the tombola machine for what must have been the strongest pairing ever in round one of a Swiss tournament. But at least Caruana had White and he responded magnificently by beating the former world champion. In the penultimate round of the tournament he had White against Carlsen and seemed to have Carlsen at his mercy out of the opening. But a long think ensued, signalling indecision, and a sequence of poor moves were all the encouragement the world champion needed to turn the tables. One comes away with the feeling that Caruana has been on the brink of great things in 2017 but not had the rub of the green. But the year is not over yet and his many fans will be hoping he shows his true class at the Classic.

Viswanathan Anand (India)

Age: 47 (turns 48 during the tournament)

URS Rating and Ranking: 2771, no. 13

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2783, no. 9

London Chess Classic last year: 5/9, 3rd=

Form in 2017: The former world champion's year started somewhat late, in April, and also rather rustily, with the small Korchnoi memorial event in Zurich where he recovered to finish third after losing in rounds one and three. In Stavanger he scored a modest 4/9, and was well down the field in the Leuven Grand Chess Tour rapid and blitz tournaments. In a short knock-out event in León, Spain, Anand lost in the final to Wesley So. The Sinquefeld Cup marked a return to solid form, as he finished joint second with Carlsen behind Vachier-Lagrave, including a stunning win against Caruana. In the FIDE World Cup in Tbilisi he succumbed to a shock defeat to Anton Kovalyov of Canada in the second round, so he proceeded to the Isle of Man where he scored a very good 7/9, level with Nakamura and half a point behind Carlsen, thus demonstrating that Swiss tournament chess is not necessarily a young man's game. By his stratospheric standards Vishy has had an indifferent year but there were encouraging signs in the Isle of Man that he is near to his best form.



Ian Nepomniachtchi (Russia)

Age: 27

URS Rating and Ranking: 2768, no. 14

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2733, no. 25

London Chess Classic last year: *did not play*

Form in 2017: Ian Nepomniachtchi will be making his debut at the London Chess Classic; he has not played chess in the UK previously. His year did not get off to a propitious start as he finished 12th out of 14 at the Tata Steel Wijk aan Zee tournament. This was followed by the Sharjah Grand Prix, which was something of a draw-fest, but he at least made a plus score there. At the Korchnoi Memorial in Zurich he finished first equal on 5/7, beating Anand but losing to co-winner Nakamura. At the Moscow Grand Prix in May he did poorly, scoring 3½/9. He rescued some rating points in some team events before having a middling performance in the Leuven rapid and blitz competitions, and then scored an above-par 5½/9 in the Geneva Grand Prix in July. The Sinquefeld Cup proved too tough as he shared last place with Wesley So, scoring a consolatory win against Nakamura. As for so many of his elite rivals, round three of the FIDE World Cup knock-out competition proved to be the end of the line in Tbilisi as he blundered and lost to local favourite Baadur Jobava. With his rating having migrated south to the tune of about 30 points over the year, he would have been glad of the opportunity of the Euro Club Cup in October to top it back up. Nepomniachtchi is an entertaining and creative

player, and the London spectators can also look forward to his ready wit and repartee in the commentary room.



Mickey Adams (England) – *Grand Chess Tour wildcard*

Age: 46

URS Rating and Ranking: 2735, no. 24

FIDE Rating and Ranking: 2727, no. 31

London Chess Classic last year: 4/9, 7th=

Form in 2017: After his steady performance at the 2016 London Classic, England number one Mickey Adams made a great start at the Tradewise Gibraltar Masters in January, scoring 5½/6 before running into the buffers against Vachier-Lagrave. He finished on 7½/10, just half a point behind the three players on the top score. In February he scored a solid 5/9 in the Sharjah Grand Prix. In March he found himself under the cosh in a very strong six-player double-cycle tournament in Shenzhen, China, finishing last on 3½/10. In April he scored 4½/9 in the Gashimov Memorial in Azerbaijan. Then, at the Moscow Grand Prix in May, he struggled once more, scoring only 3½/9, losing to Nepomniachtchi, Mamedyarov and Harikrishna (who had scored 2-0 against him in China) in consecutive rounds. At the next Grand Prix event in July, in Geneva, he scored a much better 5/9. He was knocked out in round two of the FIDE World Cup in Tbilisi by Maxim Rodshtein of Israel. Returning to the UK, he put in a much steadier performance at the Chess.com Isle of Man Masters in September, scoring an unbeaten 6½/9. Adams remains the epitome of calm, controlled chess and he will in no way be overawed by the stellar field at the 2017 London Chess Classic.

SCHEDULE

Thu Nov 30	11.00	Pro-Biz Cup - DeepMind, Google HQ, London
Fri Dec 1	14.00	Round 1 - DeepMind, Google HQ, London
Sat Dec 2	<i>rest day</i>	
Sun Dec 3	14.00	Round 2 - Olympia Conference Centre, London
Mon Dec 4	16.00	Round 3 - Olympia Conference Centre, London
Tue Dec 5	16.00	Round 4 - Olympia Conference Centre, London
Wed Dec 6	16.00	Round 5 - Olympia Conference Centre, London
Thu Dec 7	<i>rest day</i>	
Fri Dec 8	16.00	Round 6 - Olympia Conference Centre, London
Sat Dec 9	14.00	Round 7 - Olympia Conference Centre, London
Sun Dec 10	14.00	Round 8 - Olympia Conference Centre, London
Mon Dec 11	12.00	Round 9 - Olympia Conference Centre, London

ENDS



NOTES TO THE EDITORS

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About the London Chess Classic

The London Chess Classic is the flagship annual event of Chess in Schools and Communities. As the UK's largest chess tournament and the concluding leg of the Grand Chess Tour, an international circuit of high-profile chess events inspired by the legendary Garry Kasparov, the event brings with it enormous prestige in the chess community. Alongside this competition amongst the world's best players, Chess in Schools and Communities runs a range of competitions for all levels and supplies coaching days for 1,000s of children from the charity initiative nationwide.

For more information visit: Londonchessclassic.com.

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About Chess in Schools and Communities

Chess in Schools and Communities (CSC) is a UK charity whose mission is to improve children's educational outcomes and social development by introducing them to the game of chess. Founded in 2009, CSC now teaches in over 300 schools and supports 500 more nationwide. CSC also organises a world-class tournament, the London Chess Classic, and Yes2Chess, an international tournament for schools.

For more information visit: Chessinschools.co.uk.