



2nd December 2015

BRITISH KNOCKOUT CHAMPIONSHIP KICKS OFF IN STYLE

Day 1 of the inaugural British Knockout Championship provided some extremely thrilling games, but at the end of the day all the rating favourites made it through to the semi-finals.



The quarter-finals under way at the Hilton London Olympia Hotel

In the only clean sweep of the day, Luke McShane outplayed Daniel Fernandez in both games to take the match 2-0. After a somewhat disappointing result at the European Team Championship in Reykjavik, McShane will surely be very happy with this perfect start to the event.

In the encounter between Gawain Jones and Scotland's number 1, Jonathan Rowson, the latter missed a great opportunity to be clearly better in the first game, when he went 24...Nxc5 (instead of the strong 24...Bf4), which led to an immediate draw by perpetual check. In game 2, the Scotsman was slightly better in the middle game, but a blunder on move 34 seemed to seal his fate until Jones almost immediately counter-blundered with 35...h4?? (as Rowson pointed out on Twitter, 35...Qxe4 instead was totally winning for Black). However, White failed to spot a neat little tactic which would have led to the game ending in yet another perpetual check. In Rowson's own words, 'I missed the surprising 36.Rg7+!! Kxg7 37.Qd7+ 38.Qxg4+'. This oversight saw Jones go through to the semi-finals with a 1.5-0.5 win.



Howell and Zhou shaking hands before the most dramatic game of the day

Meanwhile, the match-up between the highest and lowest rated players of the tournament, David Howell and Yang-Fan Zhou, proved to be far from an easy test for England's number 2 player. Zhou played a brilliant first game with the black pieces and managed to get a substantial edge, but Howell defended stubbornly and eventually reached a drawish endgame. With both players down to their last seconds though, anything could still happen and we got to witness an incredibly dramatic time scramble. Just when the game seemed to be heading to a draw, Howell blundered with 50.Rxf7 (taking the pawn with the other rook was the way to go), but Zhou left this mistake unpunished by playing 50...Rc2 instead of the winning 50...d2. A few moves later, it was then Zhou who blundered with 53...Rc4, an opportunity Howell didn't fail to spot, which yielded him the lead in the match. In game 2, Howell was slightly better, but not wanting to take too many risks, he decided to simplify into a drawn endgame, thus taking the match 1.5-0.5.



The fateful play-off between Pert and Hawkins

In the last match of the day to finish, British Champion Jonathan Hawkins was facing Nicholas Pert (who stepped in when Nigel Short had to withdraw shortly before the event), making this the closest match-up of the day, with only 3 rating points separating both players. When the two standard games ended in rather balanced draws, this was the only match of the day to go to play-offs. In the first of two 15-minute games, Hawkins played great chess with the black pieces to take the lead in the match. On the verge of elimination, Pert produced a magnificent attacking game with the black pieces (make sure you don't forget to replay that game!) and levelled the score. The winner was thus to be settled in an Armageddon game, where White gets an extra minute, but has the obligation of winning. Hawkins won the toss and decided to pick the white pieces, with which he managed to get a clear advantage. However, Pert defended extremely well, equalised, and after a last-minute blunder by Hawkins took both the game and the match.

You can find [all the results](#) from the quarter-finals, as well as [play through all the games](#) on the [official LCC website](#). Today's semi-finals start at 10.30am, when David Howell faces Gawain Jones, while Nicholas Pert takes on Luke McShane. All the games will be broadcast live again of course, and you can [follow the action live here](#).

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