

For Immediate Release

LONDON CHESS CLASSIC HOSTS HISTORIC 'NO-CASTLING' MATCH

Imagine there's no castling, and no reams of opening theory. Would that change how you play chess – and could it prevent a boring drawfest in top-class Grandmaster games?

That's the theory being promoted by **former World Champion Vladimir Kramnik** and **tested by Google DeepMind's AlphaZero** in scores of self-play games. Instead of picking up your king, and then your rook, and niftily playing hopscotch with them, there's a new game in town.

All the other rules of normal chess apply, but there's no more playing it safe: Now the king will be engaged in hand-to-hand combat in the middle of the board, and full-scale battle will take place not after 25 moves of Ruy Lopez theory, but right from move one.

Today the new chess variant (or is that an old pre-castling form of chess?) will be unveiled to the public at the London Chess Classic as **Luke McShane** and **Gawain Jones** play [the world's first-ever Grandmaster 'No-Castling' match](#).

Play in the "No-Castling Chess" Exhibition Match starts at **4:30pm London time**, and can be followed live on the London Chess Classic website [here](#).

The match, an exhibition match featuring the two losing semi-finalists in the British Knockout Championship, is the idea of London Chess Classic tournament director Malcolm Pein, and has been inspired by the legendary former World Champion **Vladimir Kramnik**, **who has been studying self-play games** by **Google DeepMind's AlphaZero** AI program.

Kramnik promoted the new form of chess in a [thought-provoking article](#) for the website Chess.com, in which he said that "No-Castling Chess" could be just the thing to sharpen up top-class chess, reduce draws and boost creativity.

Vladimir Kramnik told the London Chess Classic today in exclusive comments: "I haven't played 'No-Castling Chess' myself – I am retired after all – but I have seen many games of AlphaZero's. I believe it is just an option, not a substitute for traditional chess. Practice will show which variation will be more popular."

The Russian former World Champion – in his heyday renowned for his deep opening preparation – said that the amount of theory was creating a “much wisdom, much sorrow” situation in elite chess events. If organisers tried the new format, they would have a “positive outcome,” he added.

And the advantages needn't be restricted to the top GMs, Kramnik said. “Amateurs would enjoy more following top tournaments, plus they would have a chance to play chess without having an opening knowledge handicap.”

Before Kramnik announced his retirement from professional chess earlier this year, he had in recent years changed his own chess style to avoid more theoretical openings. If Grandmasters could avoid having to commit long lines of theory to memory, it would free up their creativity and improve their chess, Kramnik said.

“Professional players would stop memorizing and repeating endless computer variations, [which is] especially unpleasant before games... and just sleep well, relax between games, come and play without being always in danger of... fighting against computer moves,” Kramnik said in emailed comments.

He concluded: “My idea is that ‘No-Castling Chess’ would increase public interest in the game and ideally lead to more top tournaments, and ideally more money in chess as a result.”