

Mind Sports Olympiad 2004

by Alexander Baron

There is an old joke about a man who phones a struggling football club to ask what time the match starts, and receives the reply: "What time can you get here?" Sadly, the Mind Sports Olympiad seems to be going the same way.

The first Mind Sports festivals were truly spectacular events filling the Royal Festival Hall, the massive Novotel Hotel at Hammersmith, Olympia, and Alexandra Palace. The inaugural event boasted a prize fund of a hundred thousand pounds. The guaranteed prize fund for the latest event was £13,550, most of this for bridge.

This was the third time the event had been held outside London, and the second time on the campus of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. In spite of the small prize fund and diminutive attendance (in comparison with its heyday), MSO 8 was well attended and lacked nothing in spirit. It was above all a tribute to the dedication of supremo David Levy and his small team headed by chess organiser Tony Corfe.

On a personal note, the event started disastrously for me, and I had visions or rather nightmares of Loughborough two years ago when I walked away without a single medal. Firstly though, I had to get there, and that seemed a distant prospect even a week before I bought my return ticket. Last year I picked up some sort of viral infection just before the Mind Sports and at the height of summer; this time it was neither an infection nor the musculo-skeletal problems which have made my life hell for the past fifteen and more years, but a strangely ballooning right foot. The doctor diagnosed *lymphoedema*, which is exactly what it sounds like, and advised me to lie on my back with my foot in the air, adding that provided the left foot remained unaffected I would have no worries. As there was nothing else to be done, I made a last minute booking, packed a bag and jumped on a train, arriving on the Friday afternoon in time for the first chess tournament.

I asked Tony Corfe to put me in the Minor if possible; I didn't know my current grade, but bar MSO I haven't played over the board since 2001. After the tournament started I was informed that I was still BCF 150 and would be booted up to the Major for the second round, Saturday morning. That promotion seemed unwarranted when I lost my first round game to perhaps

the weakest player in the tournament, an elderly beginner; the last I saw of him he had scored 0 out of 2 in the Olympiad Novice. During our game he played one very good move - which I saw coming but didn't think he would - and one smart move, which stupidly I overlooked.

I managed to win my second round game against a relatively strong player but after that it was all downhill; the nadir was when I lost to a very nervous player I had beaten the previous year having reached a pawn ending two tempi ahead, and then declined a draw.

I came nowhere in the first poker tournament, and I withdrew from one of the Othello tournaments when I suffered an intense headache and neck ache. I really thought this was the end for me, but after a siesta and a good night's sleep, I was alive if not kicking.

The 15-round Olympiad, 25-minute tournament, started well on the first Monday with two wins, but I soon reverted to type, and the only reason I didn't withdraw was because David Levy wouldn't let me on account of it being an all-play-all due to the minuscule turn out. Other tournaments didn't look any better, but on the Tuesday evening I picked up my first medal, in the second Seven Card Stud tournament. I was runner up to Matthew Cordell, who won the overall championship. I may have thrown away the gold, but as I was all-in several times before reaching the medals I can't complain about that. The following day I won a bronze medal in the 10 by 10 Othello.

Coming third in a world championship sounds impressive, but the tournament attracted only seven entries. Two of these I had no chance of beating: Jeremy Dyer, one of the best players in Britain, and European Supremo/former world champion Marc Tastet. After winning three games against somewhat weaker opposition I needed to beat chess junior Ankush Kandelwal to secure bronze; I lost the game but won the medal by a narrow margin on a complex tie-break.

On the Friday evening I took bronze in the London Lowball tournament - nobody's favourite version of poker - and I would have been happy with that, but paradoxically it was a poor showing in the weekend backgammon tournament that was my good fortune. After winning in the second round I lost by the narrowest of margins in the third, which meant that I was out of the medals, so I withdrew, and entered the weekend chess tournaments.

On Sunday I picked up bronze in both the time-variable blitz and the Fischer clock lighting. There were cash prizes for both tournaments; unfortunately,

the prize pool was limited to gold and silver, but you can't have everything. Then came my greatest triumph; the No Limit Texas Hold 'Em was to be run this year as a series of heads-up matches rather than a standard tournament. I don't like heads-up, and had intended to give it a miss, even though I was defending champion. Fortunately I changed my mind, and after nearly going out in the first round I held on for the second day to beat multi-gamester George Miller in the final and retain my title, becoming in the process a Grandmaster of Texas Hold 'Em.

A sad note here, when George first arrived I asked him if his wife had come along. He told me she had died of cancer earlier in the year after going into remission. I was shocked, she was only forty, and from the little I knew of her she was a really nice person. The rest of the Miller family fared well in the tournaments; elder son Jonathan is now a very bullish poker player, and the pixie-like Judith, although still only nine, held her own against adults in all the events she played and picked up a fistful of medals.

The icing on the cake for me was to pick up the silver medal in the final chess tournament, the Blitz Open Championship, one of the last events to finish.

Talking of blitz, funny things happen here. I'm not a particularly good blitz player but often my opponents make the first big blunder. This game was played in the second round against Michael Cresswell, and is a comedy of errors.

Baron,A – Cresswell,M [B02]

MSO, 2004

1.e4 ♘f6 2.e5 ♘d5 3.♘c3 ♘xc3 4.dxc3 d6 Good, he doesn't know the Sämisch Attack! 5.♙c4 e6 6.♘f3 ♘d7 7.♙g5 ♙e7 8.♙xe7 ♖xe7 9.exd6 ♖xd6 10.♖e2 0-0 11.0-0 ♘f6 12.♙ad1 ♖e7 13.♙fe1 ♙d8 14.♙xd8+ ♖xd8 15.♙d1 ♖e7 16.♘e5 ♘d7 17.♖d2?? ♘xe5 18.♖d8+ ♖f8! Yeah, I know, what back-rank mate? 19.♖xc7 ♘xc4? 20.♙d8 ♘b6?? 21.♙xf8+ ♘xf8 22.a4?? With the idea of a5, but as my opponent pointed out, ♖d8 mate is somewhat stronger. At this point he offered me a draw, and it would have been churlish to decline. Especially as I went on to beat him in the Texas Hold 'Em! ½-½

I played another curious miniature against Paco Garcia, a bridge player.

Baron,A – Garcia,P [C00]

MSO, 2004

1.e4 e6 He was not amused when I asked him why, being a Spaniard, he chose the French Defence! 2.d3 d5 3.♘d2 dxe4 4.dxe4 b6!? A questionable move that leads White to abandon the King's Indian Attack in favour of a

more direct approach. 5.♖gf3 ♘b7 6.♘b5+ ♗d7 7.♗e5 ♗gf6 8.♞f3 a6??
9.♘xd7+ 1-0

Do you see the glass half empty or half full? In spite of my winning more medals than ever, I couldn't help thinking that I could have done better. If I hadn't thrown away most of my chips on a marginal hand in the Canadian Stud I would have been in the medals in the overall poker championship, perhaps even World Amateur Champion. If I had declined the knight 'sac' in my last blitz game I might have won my first ever chess gold. Yeah, and if I'd played marginally better in the backgammon I might have won three medals instead of seven.

Corfe and Levy said the Mind Sports will be staying at UMIST for the foreseeable future, although the university itself will in effect disappear due to a merger. I will certainly play next year if I am physically able, but it is to be hoped this most worthy of events attracts more meaningful sponsorship, or it may eventually disappear up its own exhaust pipe.

Notice Board

Next Issue

The next issue of CHESS POST will appear in January 2005. Contributions should be sent to the editor by:

1st December 2004.

Please don't hesitate to send in articles, letters or anything else of interest. It would be much appreciated if items submitted for publication were word processed or at least typed. Please send your completed game scores to John Hawkes. Addresses are on page 2.

AGM Notice

The 2004 AGM of the BCCS will be held at 3:00 p.m. on 27th November 2004, via a telephone conference call. To join the meeting call **020-8589-1397** after 2:58 p.m. on the day of the meeting. When asked for a meeting I.D. number, key in **5078** followed by a hash (#). The call will cost about 1 p/min., or approx. 90 pence for the whole meeting. This is much less than the cost of travelling to a meeting. So that I can order the right number of gateways into the meeting can you please e-mail me if you plan to be joining in.