

Olympiad Report

This is an account of my own personal experiences at the 2004 chess Olympiad.

I was reserve (board 4) for the Welsh ladies team. For each match any 3 of us play. The Olympiad started on October 14th with the opening ceremony which I missed as I arrived too late.

Prior to the Olympiad I had gone on a 2 week holiday in the States which had been planned prior to my selection for the team. I had not been expecting to be selected!

This trip meant I had not played for 3 weeks.

For my preparation I had been mainly studying "101 tips to Improve your Chess" by Tony Kosten which is a fairly light weight but useful book. I had decided not to concentrate on openings as I tend to have difficulty remembering them and anyway you always get an opportunity to prepare for your opponent prior to a match.

I arrived at Palma airport at 11:00pm, to find there was nobody at the Olympiad desk. The Bangladeshi team were also there. They spoke to someone at another desk who made some phone calls and said the bus would be coming "later". Eventually the Mexican women's captain turned up. He was bilingual in Spanish and English, seemed to know what was going on and started to get things organised !!

First of all they said the bus would be here in 15 minutes, then 20 minutes then we had to wait for some more teams etc, etc.... While we were waiting the Iraqi teams turned up. I eventually plucked up courage to go and talk to them. I introduced myself and explained I was from Britain. I then asked them if it was really terrible in Iraq. They said "Yes it's really terrible". All I could do was say how sorry I was. They all came from Baghdad. Unfortunately, at this point the bus arrived (it was now 1:30am) and I did not get an opportunity to talk to them again.

I was finally dropped off outside the hotel at 2:00am. There was nobody in reception. Eventually the night porter turned up and insisted I was sharing a room with Frances Rayner. "Si Frances is a woman like Francesca", "No he's a man, I'm sharing with Olivia" "No, iis a woman" and so it went on. Eventually, he phoned someone and then agreed I was sharing with Olivia.

Unfortunately, since returning from the States I'd been suffering very badly with jetlag and been waking up at 2:00am every morning, so going to bed at 3:00 am (2:00 am British time) was the last thing I wanted. I finally got to sleep at 6:00am !

Fortunately, I was not playing for the first match. We played against a strong Czech Republic team and lost 2.5 – 0.5 with Abigail drawing on board 1. I was horrified to learn that the time control was game in 90 minutes with 30 seconds increment per move. In the past Olympiads have had long time controls e.g. 40 in 2 hrs, which really suit me.

The time control is also very awkward if you need to go to the loo towards the end of a long match. There appeared to be no provision for this in the rules. I tended to make extra trips to the loo near the start of my games just in case! I played in the second match against Bosnia who are also fairly strong. I wanted to play as I felt it would help my nerves if I could get one game out of the way. I lost my game. I thought I'd played quite well but going over it on Fritz it was not that good. I had prepared for the wrong opening. Unexpectedly my opponent played a Catalan, which I do not know very well although I used to play it as white a long time ago. Actually I played the opening reasonably well but used quite a lot of time on it and ended up in a position that I did not know how to play. Abigail and Debbie (board 2) both drew their games, which was excellent.

I did not play the third round against Tajikistan, which we won 2-1.

We were staying in the IderoStar Royal Beach hotel in Magalluf. Magalluf is reputed to be the lager lout capital of Majorca although I believe it has improved and a lot of it has been rebuilt. I did not find it too bad. The hotel backed onto the beach, which was gorgeous. The weather was good as well especially at the start. It did rain a bit towards the end.

While they were playing the 3rd round I decided to try and walk along the coast to the casino at Cala Aixedo where the Olympiad was taking place. I did not have a good map so I had to improvise a bit. I went along a couple of dirt roads but avoided footpaths as I had no way of knowing where they came out. I did make it though. It took me about 1hr 20 minutes during which I saw some lovely views of the island and some gorgeous beaches.

The security was very tight at the Olympiad. All the players and captains had photo ID cards. The entrance to the casino was a bit like boarding a plane. You had to walk through a scanner and all bags were scanned. There was also a large police presence. They would not let players stay in the playing area once their games have finished. This meant you could not watch other games. Only the top 6 (or so) matches were on electronic boards so you could not even follow your team's progress on the Internet. It was annoying and a bit over the top.

In round 4 we played against Portugal and I was disappointed to lose following my victory against Portugal in Istanbul 2000.

In round 5 we drew against Italy which was an excellent result.

I did not play in round 5 and decided I had to take some serious action in order to improve my chances. I got some exercise by swimming in the outdoor pool. The water was very cold even though the weather was nice and warm. I then spent the day going through my previous 2 games and listening and playing through some of Josh Waitzkin's chess psychology course, which comes with chess master. It's an excellent course, which I can really recommend. I also practiced playing 30 seconds per move games against the computer.

The next day I spent preparing for my game and I also went for a long fast walk for about 1 ½hrs. They say exercise helps before a chess game and I think it's true.

Anyway I was determined to win. We were playing against Mexico and I was up against a WIM. Here's my game:

Having lost my first 2 games, I was determined to win this game. The fact I was up against a WIM made no difference. I had looked up my opponent's games on chess base and prepared to play against a Kings Indian or a Nimzo. **1.d4 1...Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5** A57: Benko/Volga Gambit This was a shock, the benko gambit. With the fast time control I did not want to accept the gambit as then black can rattle off 12 moves without thinking. I chose a rather obscure line and then realised I did not know it either. **4.e3 g6 5.Nf3 Bg7 6.cxb5** The main point is that I take the pawn when I want to. [From Fritz 6.Bd3 Bb7 7.0-0 e6 8.e4 bxc4 9.Bxc4 Nxe4 10.Re1 Nf6 11.Qb3 Qb6 12.Be3 Qxb3 13.axb3 Nxd5 14.Bxc5 Bxb2 15.Rxa7 Rxa7 16.Bxa7 0-0 17.Ne5 Bxe5 18.Rxe5 Nc6 19.Bxd5 exd5 20.Re1 Nxa7 0-1 Sull,G-Gonczi,J/Gyongyos 1998/EXT 2000 (20)] **6...d6 7.Nc3 0-0 8.Bd3 Bb7**N [From Fritz 8...a6 9.0-0 axb5 10.Bxb5 Ba6 11.Re1 Bxb5 12.Nxb5 Nbd7 13.e4 Qb6 14.a4 h6 15.Qc2 Ng4 16.h3 Nge5 17.Nxe5 Nxe5 18.f4 Nd7 19.Be3 Qb7 20.Ra3 Kh7 21.Rb1 Rac8 22.Qd2 f5 23.exf5 Rxf5 24.Rd1 Nb6 25.Rb3 Rxd5 26.Qe2 Rxd1+ 27.Qxd1 Qd5 28.Rd3 Qe4 29.b3 Nd5 30.Bf2 Nxf4 31.Qf3 Qxd3 32.Qxf4 Qxb3 0-1 Casal Salgado,J-Perez Candelario,M/Orense 2000/EXT 2001 (32)] **9.e4 a6 10.0-0 axb5 11.Nxb5 c4**

[11...Na6 12.Qe2+/-] **12.Bc2** I have to hold onto the e4 pawn **12...Na6 13.Bd2**
 [13.Nd2 Nc5+/- (13...Nb4)] **13...Nc5 14.Re1 Qb6 15.a4 Ng4** I had not even
 considered this move. Now I am very worried about the sac on f2 e.g Nxf2 Kxf2 Nd3.
 Nxd4 might also be a possibility for black. It's very complicated. I decided Nfd4 just
 about held it but I would probably have to give the pawn back **16.Nfd4**
 Fortunately, black chickened out of all the complications. **16...h5** [16...Bxd4 17.Nxd4
 (17.Qxg4? looks tantalising, but 17...Bxf2+ 18.Kh1 Bxe1 19.Bxe1 Ba6-+) 17...Nb3
 (17...Nd3 18.Bxd3 Nxf2 19.Kxf2 Qxd4+ 20.Be3) 18.Bxb3 a)18.Nxb3? Qxf2+ 19.Kh1
 Qh4 20.Qxg4 Qxg4-+; b)18.Qxg4 Nxa1 19.Rxa1 Qxb2=/+ (b)19...Qxd4 20.Bc3 Qa7
 21.Qd7+/=) ; 18...Qxd4 19.Qxg4 Qxd2 20.Qd1+/-] **17.Bc3** [Throughout this
 sequence of moves I completely overlooked the obvious a5 which solves all my
 problems. I guess this is because it was not an option before move 16. 17.a5 Qd8+/-]
17...e5 [17...Ba6 18.a5 Qb7 19.Na3+/-] **18.dxe6 fxe6 19.Re2 Ne5 20.h3** I do not want
 the knight coming back to g4. [20.Re3 Ng4] **20...Ned3 21.Bxd3 cxd3 22.Re3 Bxe4**
 Black thinks she can regain the pawn but this fails to a simple tactic. [Taking with the
 knight is not much better 22...Nxe4 23.Qxd3 Nxf2 24.Qxg6 Here white keeps the
 pawn and has no serious problems. 24...Rf6 25.Qxh5 e5 26.Nf5 Rxf5 27.Qxf5 Qxe3
 28.Qxf2] **23.b4 Nd7 Nxa4** is much better **24.Rxe4 e5 25.Nf3 d5 26.Qb3 Qc6**
27.Nxe5 Nxe5 28.Bxe5 Rf7 [Here I was slightly worried about my bishop getting
 pinned but decided I could not allow 3 central passed pawns anyway. 28...Rfe8]
29.Re3 Here black's game is lost. She is a piece and a pawn down but won't give up
 without a fight. **29...Bxe5 30.Rxe5 Qf6 31.Qxd5** I can safely allow the check on f2. I
 was actually more worried about Rd8 followed by d2. **31...Qxf2+** [31...Rd8] **32.Kh1**
Rxa4 33.Re8+ Kh7 I don't need to risk taking the rook on a4 with possibilities of
 black forcing a perpetual or even mate. **34.Rd1 Ra2 35.Nd6 Rf4 36.Qb7+** Fritz says I
 have mate in 11 after Qg8 check but I calculated I could win the queen with the move
 I played and defend g2 in case I've miscalculated. **36...Kh6 37.Rh8+ Kg5 38.Qe7+**
 Rf6 Ne4 **1-0**

I felt much better after I'd won this game.

The next day was a rest day and that night the Bermuda party was held. It is the
 tradition that at every Olympiad the Bermuda team organises a party and this year was
 no exception. It was at the biggest nightclub in Europe – BCM which was within
 walking distance of our hotel. It started at 10:00pm and finished at 6:00am ! I guess
 I'm getting old but the music seemed awfully loud. I did have a good dance though.
 BCM is an amazing place with professional pole dancers and amazing laser lights.
 Some of the older chess players looked even more out of place than me and I think
 quite a few left early. I managed to stay until 3:00 am.

The younger members of the Welsh team stayed until the end but cannot remember
 much about it ! The drinks were 3 euros each (for a half) but the Bermudans had
 organised a very strong punch which tasted innocuous. This was many chess players
 down fall. While I was at the party I was surprised to meet Hazel Welch formerly a
 member of Halesowen chess club who was wearing a "host" ID badge. Unfortunately,
 because the music was so loud I was unable to find out what she was doing there but
 we had a good dance together.

The next day our rest day I went with some of the other Welsh players and Joyce
 (Puerto Rica) to Palma on the bus. Palma is a lovely city and well worth a visit. We
 went round the beautiful ornate cathedral which is full of paintings and the modern
 art museum. We also discovered that everything was cheaper in Palma than rip-off
 Magaluf !

I also played round 7 as Abigail our board one had a terrible cold and was suffering from a bad reaction to mosquito bites. I think I was the only team member who did not get bitten. We played against Turkey. I played what was probably my best game of the Olympiad but I chickened out towards the end and offered my opponent a draw. She snatched my hand off. I was getting tired and we were at the 30 seconds a move stage, which I am not very good at. Prior to that round, security had been increased by having the arbiters give special passes to the players who were actually playing. These then had to be handed in when your game finished. This was to prevent other non-playing players from coming into the playing area. My Turkish opponent somehow managed to smuggle her pass out to the 4th Turkish player who came in and watched for a while. Somehow towards the end of the game they managed to switch it back again.

At this stage I should probably say something about our routine.

I (and most of the other Welsh team members) got up around 9:00 to 9:30 am and had breakfast. I then went for a fast walk or a swim as part of my exercise routine. I then either went shopping or started to prepare for my game. At that stage we knew which team we were playing but not who our opponent was. The captains had to hand the team lists in by 10:00 am. There was an "Olympiad" desk at each of the hotels where teams were staying. The full pairings with players were then available at 12 noon first on the internet and then printed out and signed by the arbiters at each hotel. Then you could start to really prepare. Lunch in the hotel was started at 1:00 pm. The men were in a separate playing area from the women and their games started at 3:00pm and ours started at 3:30pm. There were buses to take you to the casino for the start of play and women's bus left our hotel at 2:45pm. (I noticed however that Kosteniuk had her own private car to take her) We then hung around until the start of play. Most of my games finished around 7:30 pm when there was a bit of a scramble to get on the bus back to the hotel. We tended to all come back together as a team. The bulletins for the previous days games were available at around 4:00 pm. This time there was only one bulletin per team plus a CD with all the games on it. Dinner in the hotel was from 7:00pm until 9:30pm. As part of the Olympiad you are provided with full-board accommodation. FIDE rules state that water must be provided free of charge at meals but this was not done in Majorca. You had to pay for a bottle of water. This might not seem much but for some of the poorer nations having to pay €1.30 for water at each meal is a lot. All the top matches and the Spanish matches were played on a raised area and on electronic boards. FIDE threatened that Spain would no longer play on the stage if water was not provided but no water appeared !

At around 9:30pm the pairings for the next round would be posted on the internet. In the evening at around 9:30pm we usually went out to a bar as a group. In Magaluf there are lots of noisy bars with employees outside trying to entice you in with offers such as buy one drink get 2 free. The free drinks were usually a shot and a sangria. Guaranteed to make you feel ill. At the weekends there were lots of stag and hen parties going on. We usually aimed at a quiet bar. This was usually Bacchus or Bobbies which were close to our hotel. The England team tended to hang out at Bacchus as well. I usually came back to the hotel around 12:30 am but my room mate 17 year old Olivia (our board 3) often stayed out until 5:00am and consequently got up much later than me. It obviously suited her as her chess playing was brilliant.

That Friday night (26th October) Bacchus had already closed and Bobbie's was having a closing down party as it was the end of the season. Rumours that there might be free or cheap drinks plus it was the band's last night had brought a lot of people out including Hazel.

It turned out that Hazel and some friends had come to Majorca for 2 weeks to play in one of the tournaments, which were running alongside the Olympiad. It was every night from 8:30pm to 12:30 am with the time control of game in 2 hours. Hazel was in the under 2000 section which was very strong as they used FIDE ratings and a lot of "unrated" Germans with high ELO ratings were playing.

I did not play round 8 when we were on the stage against Spain and lost 2½-½ with Abigail scoring a draw. Both Abigail and Olivia were on excellent form.

In round 9 I was playing again. We played against Bolivia and were expected to win. Unfortunately, I did not play very well and lost my game. We drew the match. My opponent did play very well though. In the Olympiad you are supposed to put your best player on board 1, 2nd on board 2 etc, however there are no checks on this and players do not have to be in rating order or anything like it. I suspect that some teams put their better players on the lower boards where they may have a chance of a board medal.

I also played round 10. This was because Jason (Abigail's husband, who was our captain) wanted to get the colours sorted. One of the hardest things for a captain at an Olympiad to do is make sure the players have a roughly even number of blacks and whites.

We played Albania and won 2-1. I drew my game with black. For my preparation, I could only find one game against my opponent with the French which went e4 e6, d4 d5,nc3 followed by something I don't play. So I spent 3 hours preparing all variations of the classical nf6. Then in the match she played the Tarrasch (3Nd2) with the unusual 4 nf3. I knew the response to this was to take one of the pawns but I took the wrong one. This left me in a mess but somehow I managed to get out of it and ended up slightly ahead but did not think it was worth playing on so settled for the draw.

After this game I only expected to play one more round. I had made plans to maybe hire a bike, do some cycling and explore the island. We played against Estonia in round 11 and drew. Abigail drew her game and Olivia won. Olivia has had a fantastic tournament so far. She is now on 6 out of 9 which earns her a WFM title. Abigail is also having a good tournament and is in line for a possible WIM for which she needed a 2250 performance rating. The Olympiad is the one place where you can earn a title outright without having to earn norms in separate tournaments. Unfortunately, FIDE are going to change these rules, which may put some aspiring players off playing. Earlier that morning, the men's board 2 had a bit of a falling out with the men's captain. He is married to the women's board 2 Debbie and Debbie was so upset by it that she was unable to play any more games. This meant that I had to play the remaining 3 matches although at the time there was a bit of uncertainty about whether or not Debbie would play.

In round 12 we played against Bangladesh and all drew our games. In my game with black, I was better after the opening and tried to attack but my opponent had seen much more than me and refuted my attack. I then had to unwind my pieces back to defence and this resulted in her winning a pawn. I got quite a bit of pressure as a result of this and in the end she had to give up a pawn in order to stop me trapping her

knight. When I accepted her draw offer I thought I was slightly better. I had a rook, bishop and 4 pawns and she had a rook, knight and 4 pawns. I also had a passed pawn. When we analysed it with the team though. It was difficult to win and some thought white was better.

After round 12 we had the Gibraltar cocktail party in the casino. It does not seem politically correct holding a Gibraltar party in Spain still the Spaniards did not seem to mind. The main purpose of the party was to advertise the Gibraltar tournament which takes place in January.

The next day we played New Zealand and won 3-0. In my game I had a good attack but went for the kill too soon instead of retaining the tension. After that the position simplified and I was slightly better. Fortunately, my opponent misplayed I was able to resume my attack and win.

We were then on 50 % and equal first in our section. The women's competition is split up into 4 sections for the purpose of awarding prizes. The next day we had to play Colombia in the last (14th) round who were on the same number of points. I should probably point out that at the Olympiad unlike league chess everything is based on game count so winning 3-0 gives you 3 points and 2-1 gives you 2 points etc.

Abigail our board one needed to win against a player of 2300, in order to secure a WIM. I needed to win in order to score 50% and get a FIDE rating of 2050. Olivia our board 3 has already secured a WFM title with 6 out of 9.

The England men have been doing very badly. They drew against Australia with Nigel Short losing. The England women team were doing very well but lost against France and Hungary.

Unfortunately, I did not play particularly well and lost my game. Abigail and Olivia both drew. This means we ended up about 5th in our section and get nothing. Colombia won the section. We came 52nd in the overall women's competition which is well above our seeding of 63. England women came 8th which is well above expectations with Harriet Hunt getting the bronze medal. The Welsh men finished 88th and were seeded 85th.

On the Friday night after the last round they held the Spanish party again in the BCM nightclub. They presented the prizes for the evening tournament going on here at 1:30 am in the morning !

Saturday 30th October was officially a rest day which was stupid as we played the last round the day before. Normally there's a rest day before the last round. The closing ceremony was on the Saturday night but it started at 6 and the buses back to the hotels are not until 8:30. We decided not to go as getting back will be chaos and our hotel stopped serving dinner at 9:30. By not going I missed the one bit of excitement of the Olympiad. (from TWIC) *When the Closing Ceremony of the XXXVI Chess Olympiad was coming to an end, with international, local and regional authorities present on the stage, Mr. Azmaiparashvili tried to gain admittance to the stage on several occasions without authorization. At that moment an agent of the Spanish Police, an*

elite force that specializes in the security of international events, tried to avoid his admittance to the stage, in accordance with the protocol of the event.

Mr. Azmaiparashvili, without any previous provocation, assaulted the agent with a head butt to his mouth. This aggression caused his arrest, after offering a strong resistance, and subsequent transfer to the Police station, to bring him before the judge.

As the Police Commander explained to the press, the aggression was witnessed by many eyewitnesses. Mr. Azmaiparashvili is at present under arrest, charged with assault and resistance to the authority.

Evidently, following this “Mrs Azmaiparashvili” would not stop screaming “let him go” and had to be dragged out of the hall !

The 2006 Olympiad is in Turin from 20th May to 4th June which is very bad timing for anyone involved in education. They are using the facilities from the Winter olympics. For the first time ever, FIDE charged €100 per player for the Olympiad this year. For the poorer countries this is a lot of money, quite a few countries are protesting by not paying it. Also, they are going to start charging for accommodation in the future. This would be pure profit for FIDE as the host country provides the accommodation free. It is also proposed to reduce the number of rounds to 11 and change the number of players to 4 plus one reserve for both women and men. I think they are changing the spirit of the Olympiad into a money making venture. The 2008 Olympiad will be held in Dresden.

There's loads more I could write about such as this great Irish bar in Santa Ponza, the fantastic weather for the first 10 days (it rained towards the end), the caves at Genoa, the bus service etc, the island swim, the hotel food but this is long enough.