By GM Magesh Panchanathan

Chess Life
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The University of Texas at Dallas has been leading the college chess world for a decade. The innovations continue as they introduce a cutting edge technology to chess in a match with an Indian school. UTD’s inter-collegiate chess matches have not been restricted just to America, but they have been connecting continents together. Their visit to China, Cuba and the Trans-Atlantic Cup (happens every year) against University of Belgrade are outstanding examples of UTD’s outreach to the international collegiate chess community.

This time around, UTD and the Chennai District Chess Association (CDCA) in India have come together to play a first of its kind online match using the cutting edge technology of Cisco Systems Inc. Telepresence to provide the viewers with a unique experience. Unlike the other common video conferencing tools, Telepresence has minimal lag and outstanding video and sound quality making the players feel just as if they were watching their rivals face to face even though they were in fact ten thousand miles away. After all, paying attention to your opponents’ facial expressions and trying to read their mental attitude from their body language is very much a part of the game itself.
I still remember the time when UTD chess program director James Stallings and Coach Rade Milovanovic mentioned to me about the first Trans-Atlantic Cup in the year 2006. I was all excited about the 16-board team match against University of Belgrade. The cheerleaders, the free pizzas, the not-so-clear video conference and the sweet taste of success added plenty of fond memories, but throughout the match, I could feel the absence of a real player in front of me making different gestures based on his position. I missed that then, and I have missed that in every single online game that I have played in my life. After seeing the pictures and videos of this match using the Telepresence technology from Cisco I feel there could be a world of difference in the future of online chess matches. Most players admitted that they did not feel like they were playing online; it felt more like a regular face-to-face tournament game.

Now that I have talked about the future of online chess and one of the participating teams, it is time to take a look at the other team. The city of Chennai, India with an estimated population of over six million (almost three times the population of Dallas!) is the home for more than one third of international masters and grandmasters in India. Having lived a major chunk of my life in Chennai, I had the privilege of knowing most of the strong and growing chess players in and around the area. Riding a bike for about ten minutes would normally take me to at least a couple of titled players’ homes.

This kind of exposure is always wonderful for budding players and as a result more and more talents are springing out of the city of Madras (as it was previously called). Not to mention, Chennai is also the home town of the current World Chess Champion Viswanathan Anand. With the growing popularity of chess in recent days, several high schools and colleges have shown interest in exposing their students more into this intellectual game. More scholarships and encouragement have led many chess players to pursue a college degree which might not have been a possibility for them a couple of decades ago. As a result we had our first intercollegiate online match between an American and an Indian university.

The match consisted of two rounds with four players from UTD and the CDCA team facing off against each other in each round. Any team that managed to score more than one point out of the possible two was supposed to be declared the winner and in case of a tie, the total number of game wins in each round would be taken into consideration to resolve the tie.

**ROUND 1**

On October 16th, 2010 these two equally-poised teams faced each other in the Cisco Telepresence room. After an invisible handshake and a few technical glitches, the first round was on its way. Chennai started the match oozing confidence, but we meant to end that. UTD’s star of the match, IM Marko Zivanic, had started pushing around the Indian IM Pandian Karthikeyan in the middlegame. It was even worse for Chennai on the fourth board when IM Julio Catalino Sadorra picked up a piece using a simple tactical combination against Karthik R. Arun. However to Dallas’ dismay, Sadorra let his advantage slip away and blundered in the latter part of the game to lose a whole point. While the top two boards were unable to provide any decisive result,
Zivanic had to win his game to keep the scores in balance and that is exactly what he did to keep UTD in the hunt for victory.

**Semi-Slav, Botvinnik System (D44)**

*IM Marko Zivanic (FIDE 2495, SRB)*
*IM Pandian Karthikeyan (FIDE 2382, IND)*
*UTD versus Chennai Telepresence match Internet Chess Club, 10.16.2010*

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 c6 5. Bg5 dxc4 6. e4 b5 7. a4

A move that has occasionally surfaced in the top level. 7. e5 h6 8. Bh4 g5 9. Nxd5 hxg5 10. Bxg5 Nbd7 11. exf6 takes us into the main line.

7. ... Bb4 8. e5 h6 9. exf6 hxg5 10. fxg7 Rg8 11. g3 Bb7 12. Bg2 Nd7 13. 0-0 Bxc3 14. bxc3 Rxc7 15. Re1


15. ... Qc7?

White’s new move is paying dividends almost immediately as Black has completely failed to understand White’s idea and Black allows White to open up the position. 15. ... a6 was necessary to consolidate the b5-pawn: 16. Ne5 Nxe5 17. Rxe5.

16. Qd2

Marko fails to seize the opportunity, but it is not uncommon to have some inaccuracies in a rapid game. 16. axb5 cxb5 17. d5 leaves Black with a very uncomfortable position: 17. ... Nc5 (Black’s king is very open after 17. ... 0-0-0 18. Nd4 exd5 [Quite awful is 18. ... Qb6 19. dxe6 Nd5 20. e7] 19. Nxb5 Qc5 20. Nxa7+) 18. Qd4 Kf8 (No better is 18. ... Rg8 19. dxe6 Nxe6 20. Rx6.) 19. dxe6 Nxe6 20. Rx6 fxe6 21. Nxb5 Rxg5 22. Qf6+ Qf7 23. Qxg5 and a very pleasant endgame for White.

16. ... g4 17. Nh4 Rg8

It was time for Black to get his king off the e-file to maintain any chance to stay in the game: 17. ... Kf8 18. Qh6 Kg8 (18. ... a6 does not help: 19. axb5 axb5 20. Rxa8+ Bxa8 21. Re4 Kg8 22. Nf5 exf5 23. Re8+ Nf8 24. Rxa8 with a clearly winning endgame for White.) 19. Rx6! fxe6 20.


With a centrally placed king one should try to close the position rather than opening it up. 23. ... b3 24. Qc5 Ba6. Even though the black king is in the middle of the board, the lack of open files ensure the king’s safety.

24. Rac1 Qd8 25. Qc5 Qb6 26. Qxc4 Rc8 27. Qxc3

White has recovered the pawn and still maintains a strong positional hold.

27. ... Qc7 28. Re5 Qd6 29. Re1 Rc8 30. a5 Ke7 31. Be4 Rg8 32. Qe3 a6 33. Rb1

And the rest of the game is pretty straightforward.


ROUND 2

Chennai’s strategy to downplay their grandmaster on board two was very good on paper, but it did not turn out to be a good idea in practice. GM Ioan-Cristian Chirila displayed his simple winning technique after he went a piece up in just 22 moves. Even though the following game was decided by a blunder, it was an important result that set tone for the match finale. Seeing a strong grandmaster as a teammate lose a game very quickly can have a huge impact on the team itself.

Queen’s pawn opening

GM Baskaran Adhiban (FIDE 2515, IND)
GM Ioan-Cristian Chirila (FIDE 2492, ROU)
UTD versus Chennai Telepresence match Internet Chess Club, 10.16.2010

Analysis begins after 14...Bf5. The opening phase is done and White has not achieved much out of it. Black has a comfortable position with a semi-open c-file and the strong central pawn on d5.
12. Rc1 Rc8 13. Nbd2 Qb6 14. Qb3 Qa6 15. c4

Getting a little over ambitious. 15. Nd4Bg6 16. N2f3 with an equal position.


Better is 20. Bd4 which would not lose a piece. 20. ... Bxd4 21. Qa4 Qa5 22. Bxe4 dxe4 23. Nb3 Qb4 with clear advantage to Black.

20. ... Nh5 21. Qxf5 g6 22. Qg4 Nxd2

And Black is up a whole piece without any counterplay from White.


It is quite difficult to say what was going on Adhiban’s mind, but this had to be a good learning experience for the young grandmaster who has plenty more to come in his chess career.

IM Vishnu Prasanna was given the daunting responsibility to hold his own against our current U.S. Open champion GM Alejandro Ramirez with the black pieces. Vishnu, who recently made his maiden grandmaster norm, has been in good form and that raised Chennai’s hopes in pushing him to board one. Such decisions are very common in team championships. Had the idea worked, it would have been tagged with the word ‘brilliant’ but unfortunately for Vishnu and Chennai, GM Ramirez was in his prime form, clinging to a strong positional grip throughout the game, never giving his opponent a chance to escape.

**Queen’s Gambit Declined (D30)**

*GM Alejandro Ramirez (FIDE 2577, USA)*
*IM Vishnu Prasanna (FIDE 2406, IND)*
*UTD versus Chennai Telepresence match Internet Chess Club, 10.16.2010*


White has managed to get a comfortable position out of the opening. The extra space that he gets because of the e5-pawn and the blockade on d4 are very helpful.

16. ... Qe7 17. a3!

Making Black commit to a queenside pawn formation.

17. ... a6

An obvious mistake is 17. ... Bxa3, dropping the pawn on e6 and allowing the white rook to

18. Bd3 a5 19. f3 Ng5

You will find towards the game’s end that the main reason Black ends up losing is due to this weak knight on g5. It is nice to watch how White continues to dominate that knight for the rest of the game and make sure that Black gets no chance to activate it.


The try 23. ... Bxd3 will not work because of this nice intermediate move: 24. Nxc8 Rxc8 25. Qxd3.


GM Ramirez has managed to trade all other minor pieces off the board, leaving Black with his only weak piece—the f7-knight.

30. ... Qe7 31. Rc2 g5

Vishnu is trying something desperate here. Black is literally defenseless against White’s penetration along the ‘c’ file.

32. Rfc1 Rd8 33. Nd4 Re8 34. Qb5 Kf8 35. b4 axb4 36. axb4 gxf4 37. exf4 Nd8 38. Rc8 Qe7 39. Qe2 Nf7 40. Rf8 c6 Nd8 41. Rd6 Rc7 42. Kg1 Qf7 43. Rxb6

Finally, White’s positional advantage is converted into a material one. The rest of the game is pretty straightforward.

43. ... Rc4 44. Nb5 Rxf4 45. Nd6 Qc7 46. Qe3 Rg4 47. Qh6+ Qg7 48. Qxg7+ Qxg7 49. Nxe8 Kxe8 50. b5 Rd7 51. Rc1 d4 52. Rd6 Rxd6 53. exd6 Kd7 54. b6 Kxd6 55. Kg1 e5 56. Kf2 e4 57. g3 h5 58. Ke2 Kd7 59. Rc7+ Kd6 60. Rh7 Kc6 61. Rxb5 Kxb6 62. Rxf5 Nc6 63. Rd5, Black resigned.

The last game was the only consolation for the Chennai team in the second round. After being wiped off the boards in the first three boards, IM Sundar Shyam played a good game to salvage one point for his team on board four. Unfortunately for Sadorra, it was his second straight loss, but luckily our team stood unaffected by his losses.

French Defense, Tarrasch Variation (C06)

IM Sundar M. Shyam (FIDE 2439, IND)
IM Julio Catalino Sadorra (FIDE 2473, PHI)
UTD versus Chennai Telepresence match Internet Chess Club, 10.16.2010

Initiating an interesting piece sacrifice. 9. dxc5 g4 10. Nd4 Ndxe5 11. N2b3 has been played before with double-edged results.

9. ... g4

Previously, this was played: 9. ... h6 10. Nxc5 Nxc5 11. dxc5 Bxc5 12. Qe2 Qc7 13. Re1 Bf8 14. c4 dxc4 15. Bxc4 Kg7 16. Bd2 Bd7 with a very good middle game position for White, however the game ended in a draw.

10. Ng5 c4 11. Qxg4

Also interesting is 11. Bxh7 cxb3 12. axb3 Ndxe5 (It is important for Black to give his piece back and try to complete his development and more importantly, take his king to safety: 12. ... Be7 is easily met by 13. Qxg4) 13. dxe5 Nxe5 14. Bf4 Qf6 15. Bxe5 Qxe5 16. Qxg4 Qg7 17. Bd3 Bd7. The open g-file, the double-bishop advantage and the open position more than compensate for White’s extra pawn and slight edge in development.

11. ... h5 12. Qf3 Qe7 13. Bc2 cxb3 14. axb3 Bg7 15. Nh7 f5

Not 15. ... Qh4?, which can get Black’s queen trapped in a bad situation: 16. Ng5 Rf8 17. Qd3, with the idea of f2-f3 and g2-g3 to trap the black queen.


In the end Dallas took home the trophy with a dominating match score of 1½-½ and game score of 5-3, defeating the Chennai team 3-1 in the last round. Still, this was a match that could have gone either way until the very last moment. Of course it did not hurt having a player like Zivanic win both of his games at critical times.

We can look forward to more matches being organized using their Telepresence technology. Finally, the Internet Chess Club (ICC) has been quietly but consistently playing a major role in development of competitive collegiate matches and several other online tournaments. Telepresence definitely has taken online matches to great new heights, but the ICC made the match happen.