

Upsetting expectations

By David R. Sands

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Washington's two big year-end events played out very differently as local fans gorged on a cornucopia of chess to close out 2006.

Upsets were the order of the day at the 33rd annual Eastern Open, where top-seeded GM Jaan Ehlvest went down to Illinois expert Kayin Barclay in the very first round.

Employing the dreaded "Swiss Gambit," Ehlvest clawed his way back into a four-way tie for first at 6-2 with fellow GM Sergei Kudrin and two dark horses -- Georgia master Kazim Gulamali and 14-year-old New York IM Fabiano Caruana. Among the Open also-rans were GMs Alex Ivanov (who lost to Caruana) and Alex Stripunsky, defeated by Ehlvest in the final-round marquee match-up.

Just a few blocks away, there were no surprises in the 60th annual Pan-Am Inter-Collegiate Team Championships, as the two top-seeded entries from the University of Texas at Dallas dominated the event. UTD's "B" squad actually took the title on tiebreaks, with the Texas twins drawing their individual clash and winning all five of their other matches.

The University of Maryland-Baltimore County, the other perennial powerhouse of the college game, tied for third with Miami Dade College, Duke and the University of Peru. UMBC was strong on the top boards with GM Pawel Blehm and IM Bruce Lopez, but it could not match the depth of the Texas teams. In the critical Round 4 match, UTD "B" edged UMBC on the strength of Board 4 alternate IM Jacek Stopa's win over UMBC expert Andrew Hubbard, rated 400 points lower.

UMBC gets another crack at Dallas as the top four American schools qualified for the U.S. college chess "final four" in March.

The Eastern attracted over 200 players, and there were fine performances in all of the class events. David Paulina took the Under-2200 section, while octogenarian Solomon Verbitsky and Dimitri Barabanov shared the Under-1900 section honors at 61/2-11/2.

Other winners: Under-1600 -- Jesse Bickford (7-1); Under-1300 -- Alexander Gilbert and Alex Chen (6-2); Blitz -- GMs Ehlvest and Ivanov (8-2); and Amateur Blitz -- Dilip Panjwani and Curtis Winter (71/2-21/2). Congratulations to all.

Stripunsky led the field by a half-point going into the final-round pairing with Ehlvest and perhaps deserved a better fate in their Sicilian Scheveningen. Ehlvest as Black sacrifices the exchange for dubious compensation, and White perhaps could have kept a safe material edge with 26. g6 Bf6 27. c3 Qxe4+ 28. Ka2, when the pinned knight is lost.

Black emerges a pawn up when the complications subside after 26. exf5?! Bxf5 27. g6 Bf6 28. Re1 Be4! 29. Rxe4 (Rg4?? Qxb2 mate) Qxe4 30. Qxd2 Kd7 31. gxh7 Rxh7, and Ehlvest shows no fear of the opposite-colored bishop ending with 52. Rd2 Rh2!, forcing a

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White's crippled queenside eventually costs him the pawn on b2, and Black uses a beautiful endgame finesse to take the point: 65. Kf1 a4! 66. Bxa4 (the bishop is lured off the long diagonal because 66...bxa4 b3 67. Bf5 b2 68. a5 Kh2 69. Be4 g3 70. a6 g2+ 71. Bxg2 b1=Q+ wins for Black) d5!!, and if White recaptures the pawn on d5 will get in the way of his own bishop.

It's hopeless after both 67. cxd5 (Bb5 g3 68. Bd7+ Kh2 69. cxd5 g2+) g3 68. Bd7+ Kh2 and 67. Bc6 dxc4 68. bxc4 b3 69. Be4 g3 70. Bg2+ Kh2 71. Be4 b2 71. Bb1 g2+, and the pawn queens. Stripunsky resigned.

UMBC's Lopez already had one of his Pan-Am wins in the other paper this week, but he generously played two striking tactical gems last weekend. Here he mercilessly pounces on a single defensive lapse by University of Toronto expert Allan Cai.

The sharper lines of the Sicilian often give the defender no margin for error, and Black's troubles here can be traced to 14. fxe5 dxe5 15. Nf5 Bf8? (Bxf5 16. Rxf5 Ne6 17. Nd5 [Rxf6!? Nd4! 18. Qg4 Bxf6 19. Nd5 Qd6 20. Rf1 Bd8 covers up nicely] Nxd5 18. cxd5 Bc5+ 19. Kh1 Nd4 20. Bxd4 exd4 holds the position) 16. Nh6+ gxh6 17. Rxf6 Ne6 18. Nd5, and White has a strong attack.

Black appears to be surviving on 18...Qc5+ 19. Kh1 Bg7 (see diagram), only to be rudely disabused by 20. Rxf7!! Nd4 (accepting the offer loses to 20...Kxf7 21. Qh5+ Kf8 [Kg8 22. Qxe8+] 22. Rf1+ Nf4 23. Nxf4 exf4 24. Qxc5+) 21. Qh5.

Black may have banked on his 21...Bg4, as 22. Qxg4? Kxf7 23. Rf1+ Kg8 24. Nf6+ Kh8 25. Nxe8 Rxe8 26. Rf7 Rg8 leaves White with some work to do. But Lopez's rook is just warming up: 22. Rxg7+! Kxg7 23. Qxg4+ Kh8 (Kf8 24. Rf1+ Nf5 25. Rxf5 mate) 24. Qd1.

Black's material deficit is modest, but his exposed king and shaky hold on the long diagonal prove fatal.

The finish: 24...Nxe2 25. Qxe2 Qd6 26. Qc3 Re6 27. c5 Qd8 28. Qg3!, and Black can't deal with the multiple threats in lines like 28...Qb8 (Qg5 29. Qxg5 hxg5 30. Nc7) 29. Nb6 Ra7 30. Rf1 and White will soon cash in. Cai resigned.

33rd Eastern Open, Washington, December 2006

Stripunsky Ehlvest

1. e4 c5 34. Bd5 b6
2. Nf3 d6 35. c3 Be5
3. d4 cxd4 36. Rg2 a5
4. Nxd4 Nf6 37. Kc2 b5
5. Nc3 e6 38. Be4 Rh4
6. g4 h6 39. Bd5 b4
7. h4 Rc6 40. c4 Kc7
8. Rg1 h5 41. Bf7 Kb6
9. gxh5 Nxh5 42. Bd5 Kc5
10. Bg5 Nf6 43. Be6 Rf4
11. Qd2 Qb6 44. Bd7 Rf3
12. Nb3 a6 45. Bg4 Rc3
13. 0-0-0 Bd7 46. Bd7 Bf6
14. Rg2 Rc8 47. Rf2 Rg3
15. f4 Nh7 48. Ba4 Be5
16. Na4 Qc7 49. Rf8 Kd4
17. Qf2 Na5 50. Bc6 Rh3
18. Nb6 Nxb3+ 51. Rf2 Ke3
19. axb3 f6 52. Rd2 Rh2

20. Nxc8 Bxc8 53. Rxh2 Bxh2
21. f5 fxg5 54. Bd7 Be5
22. hxg5 Qa5 55. Kc1 g5
23. Kb1 Qe5 56. Kc2 Kf3
24. Bc4 Be7 57. Bc6+ Kf4
25. Rh1 exf5 58. Kd3 Bxb2
26. exf5 Bxf5 59. Ke2 Bd4
27. g6 Bf6 60. Kf1 Kg3
28. Re1 Be4 61. Bd7 g4
29. Rxe4 Qxe4 62. Ke2 Bb6
30. Qd2 Kd7 63. Kf1 Kh3
31. gxh7 Rxh7 64. Ke2 Bc5
32. Re2 Qd4 65. Kf1 a4
33. Qxd4 Bxd4 66. Bxa4 d5

White resigns

Pan-Am Intercollegiate Chess Championship, Washington, December 2006

Lopez Cai

1. e4 c5 15. Nf5 Bf8
2. Nf3 e6 16. Nh6+ gxh6
3. d4 exd4 17. Rxf6 Ne6
4. Nxd4 a6 18. Nd5 Qc5+
5. Bd3 Qc7 19. Kh1 Bg7
6. 0-0 Nf6 20. Rxf7 Nd4
7. Qe2 d6 21. Qh5 Bg4
8. c4 Nbd7 22. Rxc7+ Kxc7
9. b3 Be7 23. Qxc4+ Kh8
10. Bb2 0-0 24. Qd1 Nxc2
11. Nc3 Ne5 25. Qxc2 Qd6
12. Bc2 Re8 26. Qc3 Re6
13. f4 e5 27. c5 Qd8
14. fxe5 dxe5 28. Qg3 Black
resigns

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