

ROUND ELEVEN REPORT

JAMAICA FINISHES STRONGLY AT WORLD CHESS OLYMPIAD!

Jamaica's participation in the 42nd World Chess Olympiad in Baku, Azerbaijan, concluded positively with impressive performances in the Women and Open sections, respectively, in yesterday's final (11th) round. In the Women's Section Jamaica defeated **Trinidad & Tobago** $2 \frac{1}{2} - 1 \frac{1}{2}$. Jamaica's team in the Open section created something of an upset when they held the fancied **South Africa** to a 2-2 draw.

JAMAICA WINS WEST INDIAN "WAR"!

In the final round of the **Women's section** Jamaica renewed the rivalry with fellow West Indians Trinidad & Tobago and sparks flew in this no-holds barred contest. The stakes were high as a victory by either team would propel the other up the standings.



The players from Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago shake hands before the start of their bruising final round "West Indian War"!

Players from Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago often joke among themselves that if, for whatever reason, they have a disappointing Olympiad it would be salvaged by victory against their West Indian rivals! With this “*tradition*” in mind the tension is usually high in such matches.

On board 1 the 2016 Women’s Caribbean Sub-Zonals victor **WIM Deborah Richards-Porter** saw the familiar face of Trinidad & Tobago’s **WCM Aditi Soondarsingh** across the board. The Jamaican’s aggressive intention was clear when she let loose the Sicilian Defence, both players castling long. She zoned in on the initiative very early like a well-programmed scud missile, grabbed it and never let go.

She reaped the exchange on move 21 after a poisonous knight fork and had a stranglehold on the game, her opponent having no chance against the sustained pressure. The long-time Trinidadian board 1 queen avoided the exchange of regal ladies blundering in the process, dropping a rook and threw in the towel on move 28.

THE KING PERISHED IN THE CENTRE OF THE BATTLEFIELD

On board 2 **CM Rachel Miller** faced the Sicilian Defence by Trinidadian **WFM Javanna Smith**, the young woman from the land of the Hummingbird displaying her ambition to get the full point by marching her foot-soldiers menacingly on the queenside. The Jamaican absorbed the early onslaught and then launched a vicious counter-assault on the kingside putting her superior development to good use. Smith committed the cardinal sin of leaving her king in the centre of the battlefield where the furnace is usually hottest. As often happens she suffered major burns ignoring Miller’s queen and rook battery along the f-file and was checkmated on move 27.

On board 3 a tough battle (*another Sicilian Defence!*) was played out between one of Trinidad’s promising young players **CM Shannon Yearwood** and Jamaica’s reigning Women’s champion **WCM Annesha Smith**. Yearwood, playing with white pieces, fought well but her more experienced opponent easily neutralized her attempts to get any advantage. When the draw was agreed on move **41** in a bishop against knight end-game, material was equal but Smith had

the much better position.

The above-mentioned final score ($2 \frac{1}{2} - 1 \frac{1}{2}$ in Jamaica's favour) was realized when the "Trinis" obtained a consolation victory on board 4. **WCM Gabriella Johnson** wielded the black pieces to defeat **WCM Melisha Smith** in **39** moves. The Jamaican had no answer to her opponent's Bogo-Indian/Queen's Indian Defence hybrid opening. In fact, Johnson's win completed a fine tournament as she scored $7 \frac{1}{2}$ points from ten 10 games to earn the Woman Fide Master ("**WFM**") title. **Sonja Johnson**, Gabriella's mother and the president of the T&T Chess Association, was filled with pride and could be seen walking with an extra pep in her step!

Jamaica's women ended on 10 points and in **86th** position, down from the starting rank of 75 but way ahead of rival West Indian neighbours – **Trinidad & Tobago (108 – 8 points)**; **Guyana (127 – 6 points)**; *Maria Varona-Thomas earning the WFM title with 8 points from 11 games*; and **Barbados (128 – 6 points)**.

CHINESE WOMEN DETHRONE RUSSIANS

In the top-of-the table clash **China**, needing only a draw to win the gold medals, defeated the defending Champion Russia $2 \frac{1}{2} - 1 \frac{1}{2}$ to end on **20** points and reclaim the trophy. This defeat sent the Russian women plummeting down the tables to fourth (**16 points**) and tumbling from the podium in an amazing development. **Poland** and **Ukraine** ended on **17** points each but Poland took the silver medals in their best-ever showing at an Olympiad.

MATCHING SOUTH AFRICA IN THE FINAL "DANCE"!

Unlike the previous rounds that started at 3:00 pm, the **11th** (FINAL) commenced at **11 am** local time on Tuesday, September 13. This was to facilitate the closing ceremony scheduled for 7:30 pm the same day. In **match 49**, in the **Open section** Jamaica was paired to face **South Africa**, ranked 79 a significant 36 places higher. Although "**Nelson Mandela's men**" rested Grandmaster Kenny Solomon their team was, on paper, far superior to Jamaica's.



Jamaica played well to hold higher rated South Africa to 2-2 draw.

Indeed, of the four players they registered for the contest, South Africa fielded three International Masters (*“IM” – a rank second only to “Grandmaster” - the highest possible title*). Further, the individual ratings of the Africans were significantly higher than their opponents’ suggesting that they would make light work of them. To return to my Boxing analogy given some rounds ago, there were boxers in two different categories the Africans *“out-weighing”* the West Indians tremendously.

On board 1 ***FM Warren Elliott*** (2238) maintained the high level of play he had shown consistently over the past few rounds. Armed with the white pieces against ***IM Daniel Cawdery*** (2416) he chose the King’s pawn opening (1.e4) and was met with the Sicilian Defence. The game transposed into the Sveshnikov variation and a keen tussle was eventually drawn on move 40, neither player able to progress in an ending with bishops of opposite colour. This was actually the second game to be concluded in the match.

NO TIME TO RE-LOAD!!

The first game to end was on board 2 where Jamaican **FM Damion Davy** (2117) met S. African **IM Watu Kobese** (2350) a legend of African Chess. Indeed, Watu is a “beast” of a player and has among his “scalp collection” a sensational victory at the 2001 FIDE World Championship Knock-out Tournament over **Grandmaster Peter Leko**, World Championship challenger (2004) and one of Hungary’s greatest-ever players.

Coming off his brilliant win with the white pieces the previous round, Davy deployed the Sicilian Defence but his armoury had no ammunition having been fully used in the previous battle! He did not have time to re-load!

Kobese, in the style of Field Marshall Montgomery during World War II, pursued an excellent “war” strategy. After the heavy artillery had left the battlefield the S. African had a superior knight against the Jamaican’s bishop in an overwhelming endgame and forced resignation in **33** moves, Davy appreciating that fatal haemorrhaging was inevitable.

SNATCHING VICTORY FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT!

Trailing ½ - 1 ½, Jamaica turned to its bottom boards to salvage the encounter. On board 3 Jamaica’s schoolboy debutant **NM Shreyas Smith** (2146) had the white pieces against **IM Donovan Van den Heever** (2247). The African chose the Pirc Defence and a fierce, blood-curdling battle ensued after both combatants had castled on opposite sides of the chess war zone.

Appreciating that he had to win as Jamaica was behind in the match, Smith mounted an all-out offensive taking risk after risk, sacrificing material left, right and centre to breach the enemy’s fortifications and get to the opposing monarch. In fact, by move **33** Shreyas had sacrificed no fewer than three pawns and the exchange, the last offering allowing Donovan to take the Jamaican’s b1-rook while promoting to a queen with check!

The African defended stoutly simultaneously preventing the

bombardment from reaching his king while generating significant threats on both flanks of the battlefield.

With both players going for the jugular Smith's intrepid play seemed to backfire as he incurred significant material deficit and exposed his king to the mercy of Van den Heever's queen and rook combination – which operated like bazookas and tanks!

A MEMORABLE VICTORY!

With the Jamaican on the ropes and his opponent ready to pounce, **Caissa** (*the goddess of Chess*) smiled on Smith. His opponent (*ahead on material but with less than a minute to make several moves to reach the time control*) missed a potent riposte and the chance to deliver a deadly blow to the Jamaican's solar plexus (**36...Rg2+!**). Instead he chose to exchange queens and enter a promising endgame the exchange up. With just seconds to reach move 40 and make the time control, he erred with 39...Rg6 (*39...Rg1 was necessary*) - a big mistake!

Emerging off the ropes in the style of the great **Muhammad Ali's** rope-a-dope, Shreyas roared to life and invaded the enemy territory with a fearsome knight. Donovan succumbed to the pressure, dropped a rook and resigned on move 56 in the ensuing, hopeless position.

The Jamaican teenager had registered a momentous break-through victory, his first win against an **"IM"**, hauling his country back as the scores were now level at **1 ½ - 1 ½**.

THE "DECIDER"!

All eyes were now turned to board 4, the final game to finish. The result of this clash would decide the fate of the match. South Africa's **FM Calvin Jong Klaasen** (2177) had the white pieces against **CM Brandon Wilson** (2074). The African Came out swinging and had the Jamaican on the back-foot throughout after Wilson chose a Benoni set-up.

Although the queens were exchanged on move 18, Klaasen launched

wave after wave of attack but Wilson fought resolutely, refusing to bow! On more than one occasion it appeared that the man from **Miriam Makeba's** homeland would effect a timely breakthrough but Wilson hurriedly re-deployed his troops to defend his besieged points. After eighty-six (86!) moves and over six (6!!) hours of play Klassen with a rook to Wilson's knight, acknowledged the inevitable and the men signed the peace treaty.

WEST INDIAN MEN DID WELL IN THEIR CATEGORY!!

Wilson's draw meant that the final score (**2-2**) was something of a moral "victory" for Jamaica. This result meant that the Jamaicans ended on **10 points** and improved their position in the standings, finishing **102** (*thirteen places above their starting ranking*) out of 180 registered countries. In fact, Jamaica tied for 3rd in its category (4th on tie-breaks) behind **Sudan** (12 points and **71st – up 39 places**), **Barbados** (11 points – **90th – up 13 places**) and Pakistan (10 points - **100th up 9 places**).

West Indian "colleague" **Trinidad & Tobago** also ended on 10 points (**104th – up 9 places**) and 5th in the category. **Bahamas** (5 points) finished in **157th** (down from 151) and **Guyana** (5 points) **164th** down from 157.

Special mention must be made of the Barbadians who played very well and actually led the category entering the final round against Denmark but lost (3-1) against four grandmasters. **IM Terry Farley** did the men from "**the land of the flying fish**" proud by defeating GM Allan Stig Rasmussen on board 4. Had they won that match they would have been clear category winners.

USA WINS THE OPEN SECTION

The **United States of America** pulled off a nail-biting **2 ½ - 1 ½** victory over North American rivals Canada in the final round to register **20 points**. This allowed the Americans to claim their first Olympiad gold medals in forty years, since the 22nd Olympiad in 1976 (*Haifa, Israel*) which was boycotted by the powerful Soviet Union chess machine.

Although the strong Armenians did not play in Baku due to their long-standing issues with Azerbaijan, this did not dampen the exhilaration felt by the American players and their legions of fans. The USA had a “***dream team***” with three of the world’s top ten players in their ranks - GMs Fabiano Caruana, Hikaru Nakamura and Wesley So. The other players - GMs Samuel Shankland and Ray Robson - were no slouches consequently their victory was not a surprise. The “*investment*” in the team clearly paid handsome dividends.

Ukraine defeated Slovenia 3 ½ - ½ to end on **20** points as well but was second on tie-break. In fact, there was tremendous tension as long after the top two teams had won their matches it was still not known which of the two had won the event! This was because the tie-break system used was the **Sonneborn-Berger** where the final standings of other teams played by the title contenders become relevant.

A CRUCIAL RESULT BETWEEN NON-CONTENDERS

In summary, the fate of the title rested on **match 28** between **Germany and Jordan** which Germany eventually won 2 ½ - 1½. On board 3 GM Matthias Bluebaum defeated IM Tarvo Seeman in a crucial encounter as players, the media, organizers and spectators waited with bated breath. Had this game ended in a draw and the match tied 2-2, Ukraine and not the USA would have taken top honours!!

Russia defeated Italy 3-1 to secure the bronze medals with **18** points, former world champion **GM Vladimir Kramnik** winning his game to reach 2817 rating points, the highest in his illustrious career.

Worthy of mention is **Norway’s** surprisingly high 5th place finish (**16 points – the same as 4th place India**) as they were led by a determined World Champion, **GM Magnus Carlsen**, who scored an unbeaten **7.5 points** from ten games to end with a plus five score – five wins and five draws.

RULES OF PLAY

Each player had 90 minutes for the first 40 moves, an additional 30

minutes thereafter, plus 30 seconds per move from move 1. A point was awarded for a win; a half point for a draw and zero for a loss on each board. When the points were tabulated the team with more was declared the winner and awarded match points. No player was allowed to offer a draw until after 30 moves had been completed.

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All photographs courtesy of the Jamaica Chess Federation unless indicated otherwise.