



The European Club Cup took place in Kallithea, Halkidiki, Greece, from October 16th – 24th. Two English teams, Barbican and Betsson, competed, being seeded 27th and 36th respectively out of a record number of 64 teams.

Unlike the last time that Barbican competed at the European Club Cup, in St. Vincent, Italy in 2005, this time all the teams who took the official accommodation were housed in the same hotel complex (in fact a group of three hotels) as the playing venue, which led to a very sociable atmosphere and many opportunities for '2700 spotting' (Right - Invigorated by spending the morning on the beach wearing rather less than pictured here, Alexei Shirov ponders how to continue against Emil Sutovsky's Gruenfeld.).



Conditions in the playing hall at the Athos Palace Hotel were acceptable, with a reasonable amount of space, although it did get quite warm at times with almost 400 players and perhaps 50 spectators, captains, arbiters and others around, not to mention noisy around the time control and later in the session. The women's playing area in the neighbouring Pallini Beach Hotel was better still, being much quieter and comparatively far less crowded, with only 18 teams (of 4 boards each) taking part.

The organisers did a good job of keeping everything running smoothly and team and individual pairings were, in general, published very promptly. One minor criticism would be that some information was only available on the website rather than posted outside the playing area and the hotel wireless internet connection occasionally ground to a halt under the barrage of hundreds of laptop-wielding chess players, but otherwise there were no problems.

Excepting some one-sided encounters when one of the elite teams crushed a weaker team, matches were generally fiercely contested and with only six boards, a single upset could put matters on a knife-edge. The English teams had mixed fortunes - having players in form and some luck are both needed in order to make the most of one's chances and Barbican had little of either of these things, while Betsson certainly seemed to have the former, and perhaps the latter too.

Both teams lost their sole clashes with one of the top seeds; Betsson going down ½-5½ to 4th seeded Economist Saratov in round 1, while Barbican failed to trouble the scorers at all in their encounter with top seeds Ural Sverdlovskaya in round 2, despite having some promising positions and at least one clear draw in the endgame. However in tight matches, Betsson won through, twice drawing 3-3 and once winning 3½-2½ against similar or higher-rated opposition (and in fact crushing another similarly-rated Dutch team, HMC Calder 5-1, without losing a game), while Barbican lost two matches by 2½-3½ and could only draw 3-3 against a team from Aarhus whom we had hoped to beat. (Right - Barbican vs Ural Sverdlovskaya)



In the men's competition, the winners were Ural Sverdlovskaya of Russia with 12 match points (+6 =0 -1) on tie-break, ahead of OSG Baden-Baden of Germany (+5 =2 - 0), with PVK Kiev of Ukraine in third place with 11 match points (+4 =3 -0).

Betsson placed 22nd and Barbican finished 33rd.

In the women's competition, the winners were Cercle d'Echecs Monte Carlo of Monaco with 12 match points (+5 =2 -0), ahead of Spartak Vidnoe of Russia and T-Com Podgorica of Montenegro, both with 10 match points (+4 =2 -1).

The ECC is one of the few events that gives players the opportunity for a title norm over less than nine games, and many players took advantage of this: 3 WIM norms, 1 WGM norm, 9 IM norms and 5 GM norms were made in the event (subject to official confirmation). The GM norms were: IM Jan Sorensen (Aarhus / Denmark), IM Nikoloz Shavtvaladze (Thessaloniki / Georgia), IM Jon Ludwig Hammer (OSS / Norway), IM Anna Muzychuk (T-Com Podgorica / Slovenia), and Tamir Nabaty (Beer Sheva / Israel). Congratulations also to FM Bob Eames of Betsson who made his first IM norm.



On top board, Jonathan Parker takes on Teimour Radjabov in the Four Pawns Attack of the Kings Indian and managed to pose some interesting problems for the current world number 8 before eventually succumbing.



Even the supposedly weaker teams are no pushovers. Barbican met stern resistance from Aarhus in round 6 and the match was eventually drawn 3-3. IM Jan Sorensen (far left) defeated Sam Collins on board 2 to set this result up on his way to a GM norm.



Betsson made a very successful debut in European competition to finish in 22nd place, with FM Bob Eames (front) making his first IM norm on board 4. The rest of the middle order (FM's Laurence Webb, Chris Duncan and Dave Ledger) also made valuable contributions, all finishing with plus scores.



One of the crunch matches that decided the title. OSG Baden-Baden on the left (Svidler, Bacrot, Nisipeanu, Naiditsch, Harikrishna, Krasenkow) were held to a 3-3 draw by PVK Kiev (Karjakin, Jakovenko, Efimenko [standing], Onischuk, Miroshnichenko, Beliavsky), and despite these two teams both remaining undefeated, they were eventually forced to settle for 2nd and 3rd places. Another member of the 2700-club (Ponomarev) kibitzes the game Bacrot – Jakovenko.

While Barbican and Betsson were the only English teams present, there were a couple of other English representatives too, with Gawain Jones on top board for his Irish team Ennis, while Michael Adams played top board for his Spanish team Linex Magic.



A strong top two to have to face – Teimour Radjabov and Gata Kamsky of Ural Sverdlovskaya. The chance to see these world class players at first hand and up close is one of the great attractions of playing in this event.



Armenian 2nd seeds Mika, fielding Magnus Carlsen and Levon Aronian, had a somewhat disappointing event despite beating top seeds Ural, losing narrowly to Baden-Baden and again in this match with TPS Saransk of Russia by 2½-3½ and eventually finished in 12th place.

Maxim Devereaux, Barbican.