

MELBOURNE CHESS CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP 2006

Report and Selected Games

By Thai Ly

The 140th edition of the Melbourne Chess Club Championship has been run and won. And the winner is a young, yet familiar face: Sam Chow.

In what turned out to be a three horse race, Sam Chow won his first Club Championship by finishing outright first with 8/9 points (+7, =2, -0). Club stalwarts Guy West and Mirko Rujevic both finished equal second on 7½/9 points. The tournament was ACF and FIDE rated.

The 9 round Championship began on 9 February 2006 with a field of 33 players. Reigning (and multiple-time) champion, IM Guy West returned as top seed, a position he had in his pocket now that the most recent rival for the top seeding, IM Peter Froehlich, has moved to Queensland. IM Mirko Rujevic has also returned, still looking for his first Club Championship. Sam Chow was third seed, making his return to the Club and, more generally, his chess comeback after a few years away from the board. Other top seeds included Malcolm Pyke, fresh from a fair run took at the most recent Australian championship, and Domagoj Dragicovic.

The Melbourne Chess Club extended a warm welcome to all participants in its first major tournament for the year, particularly those players debuting in the Club Championship: ex-Queenslander Leon Bowen, Peter Wolf, Judd Niemann, Jean Watson and Daryl Prasad. Also notably was the return of Gary Lycett to the Club, who has managed to fit in time in addition to his hectic job and play and organising down at the Dandenong Chess Club.

There were only two upsets in the first round: Pyke draw with Alex Kaplan, where Malcolm overlooks perpetually check in an otherwise advantageous endgame, and Richard Voon's shocking

blunder of his queen in losing to Adel Ghobrial.

The top four boards followed the script in round 2, but immediately below were surprise results: Bob Krstic losing an exchange and then the game to Felix Wyss; Thai Ly allowing the win to slip in his encounter with Adam Lovegrove; and Marcus Raine losing quickly with his king in the centre and under attack from Peter Wolf's forces. Notably, the only woman in the field, Jean Watson recorded a good result in holding Roger Beattie to a draw.

Round 3 saw the top three consolidate their lead over the remaining field. Guy West convincingly beat Dragicovic in the endgame, with a superior minor piece and pawn-structure leading to a win of a pawn. Wyss was no match for Rujevic, while Chow slowly but surely ground down Wolf, in an un-flashy fashion. Richard Voon continued his poor form, this round losing to Richard McCart. Watson again had a creditable result, this time holding Nick Ivanov, in great form prior to this tournament, to a draw. Judd Niemann won his first game in his postponed encounter with Alec Knox.

The first of the crucial encounters between the top seeds occurred in round 4, with West with white against Rujevic's black forces. Honours were shared after a long tussle. Sam Chow had little trouble dispatching Kaplan, while Pyke's chance of winning the tournament took a severe blow with defeat as white against Dragicovic. Conceding 1½ points after round 4 surely could not have been on Malcolm's agenda with potentially Chow and the two IM's still to await him. Lovegrove had a good result in drawing with Beattie. Daryl Prasad recorded his first tournament win against the esteemed former Club president (and Appeal Court judge) Bob Brooking.

The top board for round 5 was Rujevic versus Chow. Sam had little trouble holding the draw with his favourite French Defence, an opening he knows well. The draw left Chow on 4½ points going into the Labour Day long weekend (and the Begonia tournament, in which some members also played in). Guy West won as expected against Krstic on board 2 and was also 4½ points. Mirko was equal third with 4 points with Dragicevic, who kept his hopes alive by beating Raine. Ghobrial had another good win on top of his win against Voon, beating George Zileski.

A quirk of the Swiss draw meant that Chow again had black against his closest rival for round 6, Guy West. However, as in his game against Rujevic, Chow had no problem holding a draw, indeed being slightly better at stages after the opening (a Torre Attack) of the game against West. Rujevic and Dragicevic tried hard to get a result against one another, but both had to settle for a draw – a result that helped neither. Peter Wolf had a great tournament, and round 6 was another pinnacle for him, beating former champion Krstic.

Round 7 had a number of intriguing match-ups as the tournament entered its third Act. Pyke, now recovered to 4½ points, had white against West who was on 5. Malcolm had previously beaten Guy with White before. However, on this occasion the higher rated West prevailed. Chow and Dragicevic had a real ding-dong battle. Domagoj, with black, created an imbalance right out of the opening, exchanging a piece for three pawns. The position was dynamically balanced with Chow somewhat less well developed. However, Sam released much of the tension in the position by exchanging the queens. He then displayed better technique by first exchanging more forces and then exploiting Dragicevic's mistakes in an endgame where Chow's two bishops outweighed black's lone bishop and three pawns. Rujevic quietly lurked behind both West and Chow, winning against Raine. Voon beat Bowen to dent the latter's chance at a rating prize. Wolf

could have put Ly under real pressure in their major-pieces endgame, but had to be satisfied with a draw (still a reasonable result) after misplaying the endgame. Ghobrial had a third great result, beating Jim Papadinis in their postponed game. Manny Ruzeu caused the biggest boilover of the round, beating veteran Felix Wyss.

Round 8 proved to be the pivotal round of the tournament. On the top board, West played as white against Thai Ly and could only manage a draw. A surprising result, but not one that was totally unexpected – this was Ly's third draw with West in about the past year. The game was tense, as West allowed the game to meander into a position worse for white. Worse still, he fell behind badly on the clock. However, with game in his control, Ly did not fully exploit his pressure, instead allowing West to counterattack. In the final moves, it was clear that West was in no danger of losing as he had a draw by repetition. But did he have more? Maybe, but with only about a minute plus increments left on his clock, he took the draw.

Meanwhile, Chow was observing this and playing his game as white against Pyke. Chow played the opening quietly and slowly but surely ground down black's position. Eventually, Pyke capitulated to give Chow a ½ point lead over West and Rujevic, who won against Voon going into the last round. In other results, Dragicevic effectively lost all touch with the top three, only being able to draw with his pet Scandinavian opening against Wolf. Beattie kept his consistent second half of the tournament going with a win against Tom Kalisch, as Ghobrial drew with Bowen. Junior, Jean Luc Tambasco had a good win against Lovegrove.

The final round was the end of a long and successful journey for Chow. His was one of the later boards to finish. Playing his favourite French again, he won a pawn against Krstic's gambit sideline (the Wade Variation). Eventually, he would be a rook up against his opponent and from that moment on the title was his. Chow's win was well received by the various non-playing members present.

West and Rujevic also won to ensure that they would share equal second with 7½ points. West won his game relatively easily and early against Voon, but he knew that the fate of the title was out of his hands. Thai Ly won his game and the A group rating prize, finishing on 6/9 points (4th overall) with a 9 move miniature in the Spanish Opening against a tired Marcus Raine. Beattie was for a major part of the game a pawn up and had the better of his draw against Domagoj Dragicevic to eventually run out as winner of the B group rating prize with 5½ points. Steve Wertheim beat Paul Kovacevic to finish on 4½ points and winner of the C group rating prize.

Sam Chow – quick profile

Born in 1987 in Malaysia, Sam has been playing chess since the age of five. Very soon after his first appearance on the chess scene at Melbourne Chess Club, other more experience players quickly identified Sam as a phenomenal natural talent, with a sharp eye for tactics and great vision of the board. He also quickly acquired a very sound positional understanding. He won the Melbourne Chess Club Junior Championship, was 6 years old when he became Victorian under 10's champ and came 2nd to Bob Krstic in the 2001 Club Championship. Further, he was the leading junior Victorian chess player of his generation and participated in the 2002 Australian Championship.

Surprisingly however, Sam never won the title of Australian Junior Chess Champion, as non-chess activities, particularly education, became a priority. Educated at Scotch College, he has effectively been on a chess hiatus for the pass two year in order to complete his year 11 and 12 schooling (although, he did play in the 2005 Australian Juniors). In that time, Sam's chess talents have been somewhat forgotten, as other younger stars such as Moulton Ly, Raymond and Angela Song and Chris Wallis have taken the limelight.

Now with the pressure of year 12 passed (he now studies Commerce/Science at the University of Melbourne), Sam has been

able to make a welcomed return to chess this summer and has shown that he has lost none of his skills. In addition to winning this tournament, he has also shared equal first at the recent Box Hill Chess Club Autumn Cup.

The Melbourne Chess Club congratulates its new champion and looks forward to more great chess from Sam in the future.



Sam Chow – 2006 Melbourne Chess Club Champion

(Photo courtesy of Box Hill Chess Club).

Final Standings

1	Chow, Samuel	VIC	2192	8
2-3	West, Guy	VIC	2378	7.5
	Rujevic, Mirko	VIC	2252	7.5
4	Ly, Thai	VIC	1866	6
5-7	Dragicevic, Domagoj	VIC	2129	5.5
	Pyke, Malcolm L	VIC	2079	5.5
	Beattie, Roger	VIC	1688	5.5
8-15	Wolf, Peter	VIC	1758	5
	Raine, Marcus	VIC	1862	5
	Voon, Richard	VIC	1885	5
	Krstic, Slobodan	VIC	1928	5
	Kalisch, Thomas	VIC	1801	5
	McCart, Richard	VIC	1697	5
	Ghobrial, Adel	VIC	1569	5
	Lycett, Garry	VIC	1693	5
16-17	Bowen, Leon	QLD	1787	4.5
	Wertheim, Stephen	VIC	1523	4.5
18-24	Wyss, Felix	VIC	1730	4
	Papadinis, Jim	VIC	1778	4
	Kaplan, Alex	VIC	1640	4
	Kovacevic, Paul	VIC	1683	4
	Ruzeu, Emanuel	VIC	1355	4
	Renzies, Elliott	VIC	1481	4
	Knox, Alec	VIC	1531	4
25-27	Niemann, Judd			3.5
	Ivanov, Nikola	VIC	1517	3.5
	Tambasco, Jean-Luc	VIC	1054	3.5
28-30	Zileski, George	VIC	1760	3
	Watson, Jean	VIC	1094	3
	Prasad, Daryl			3
31	Lovegrove, Adam	VIC	1439	2
32	Wright, Jim	VIC	1601	1
33	Brooking, Robert	VIC	1471	0

Feature Games

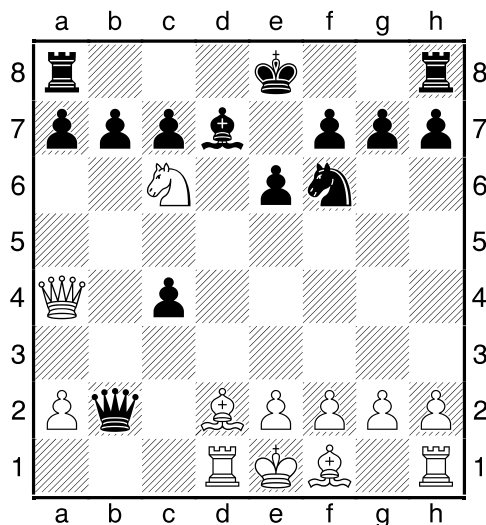
The new Melbourne Chess Club Champion has generously annotated two of his games. Although these games do not feature his battles with either of the IMs, the importance of these two games should not be underestimated – they were played in towards the business end of the tournament and were both strategically complex struggles, which Sam won.

Chow, Sam – Dragicevic, Domagoj [D30]

2006 MCC Championship (Round 7)

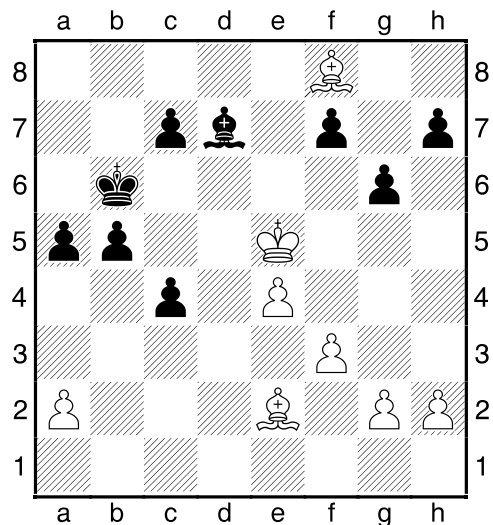
[Annotated by Sam Chow]

1.d4 ♘f6 **2.c4** e6 **3.♗f3** d5 **4.♙g5** ♖b4+
5.♗bd2 5.Nc3 dxc4 is well-known.
5...dxc4 **6.♙a4+** [6.e3 b5 7.a4 c6 doesn't appear to yield any compensation; whilst 6.e4 ♗xd2+ 7.♙xd2 ♗xe4 appears unsatisfactory.] **6...♗c6** **7.♗e5** [7.e4 again looks weak because of 7...♗xd2+; while 7.e3 ♙d5 (intending b5) makes life difficult for white.] **7...♙xd4** [7...♗d7 8.♗xc6 ♗xd2+ 9.♗xd2 ♗xc6 10.♙xc4 achieves a fairly level position.; 7...♙d5 8.♗xc6 ♗xd2+ 9.♗xd2 ♗d7 again seems fairly level.] **8.♗xc6** ♗xd2+ [8...♙xb2 9.♗xb4+ ♗d7 10.♙b1 ♙xb1+ 11.♗xb1 ♗xa4 is interesting. White will probably get the c4 pawn, but black still has a rook and two pawns for two pieces.] **9.♗xd2** ♙xb2
10.♙d1 ♗d7 (D)



11.♙b4 My opponent missed this move. However, it's not so bad for him. **11...♙xb4**
12.♗xb4 0-0-0? [12...c5 13.♗c2 ♗e4 is important here. Black needs to play actively before white is able to regroup and to realise his material advantage. 14.f3 ♗a4 15.♙c1 ♗xd2 16.♗xd2 0-0-0+ 17.♗e1 b5 18.e4 ♙d6 19.♗e2 ♙hd8 is one possible variation. Black prepares to penetrate through the d-file.] **13.f3** ♗d5 **14.e4** ♗xb4
15.♗xb4 b5 **16.♗e2** ♗c6 **17.♗f2** ♗b7
18.♙xd8 ♙xd8 **19.♙d1** ♙xd1 [19...♙a8 at

least keeps the rooks on. The exchange seems to make white's task easier.] **20.♗xd1** ♗b6 **21.♗e3** a5 Black's kingside pawns must stay on dark squares; otherwise they may be fixed and become targets for my dark-squared bishop. **22.♗f8** g6 **23.♗d4** ♗d7 **24.♗e2** e5+ **25.♗xe5** (D)



25...c3 [25...c5 26.♗e7 ♗c6 27.a4 ♗e6 seems to put up a better fight.] Now my king gets back into it and rounds up the charging pawns. **26.♗d4** c2 **27.♗h6** ♗e6
28.a3 b4 **29.axb4** axb4 **30.♗c4** b3 **31.♗c1**
 ♗a5 **32.♗xe6** fxe6 **33.♗c4** 1-0

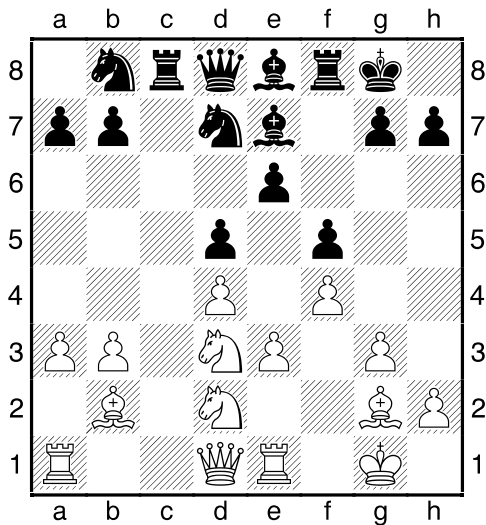
Chow, Sam – Pyke, Malcolm [A43]

2006 MCC Championship (Round 8)

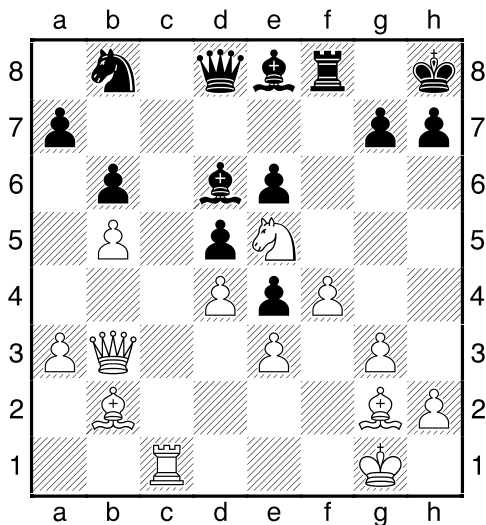
[Annotated by Sam Chow]

1.d4 c5 **2.c3** Not remembering much about the Benoni, I decided just to keep it simple for now. **2...e6** **3.♗f3** ♗f6 **4.g3** d5
5.♗g2 ♗e7 **6.0-0** 0-0 Here I stopped to think about how I could get an advantage from such an innocuous-looking position. After some brief calculation, I decided to stick a knight on e5 and apply some pressure on his cramped queenside. **7.♗e5** ♗c6 **8.f4** ♗d7 **9.e3** ♙c8 **10.♗d2**
 ♗b8 **11.a3** I needed some space for my dark-squared bishop, so that I could connect my rooks. **11...♗b5** **12.♙e1** ♗e8
13.b3 [13.b4 cxd4 14.cxd4 a5 and my queenside is looking a little shaky]

13...cxd4 14.cxd4 ♖fd7 15.♗b2 f6
16.♗d3 f5 (D)

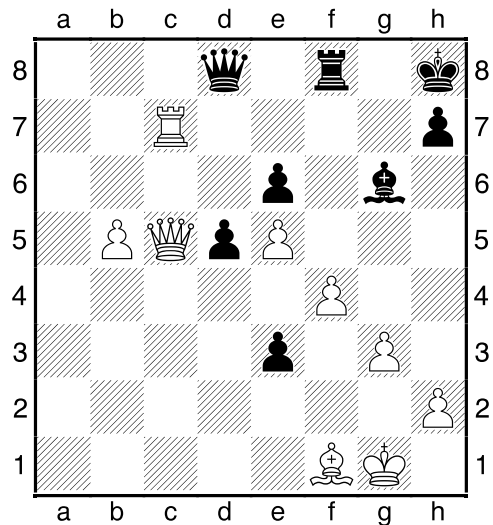


I had intended 17.e4, hoping to exploit black's weak pawn on e6. 17.b4 b6? Now I begin to clamp down on the queenside. 18.b5 ♖f6 19.♗b3 ♗h8 20.♖ac1 ♖xc1 21.♖xc1 ♗e4 22.♗xe4 fxe4 23.♗e5 ♗d6 (D)



24.♗f1 Giving further protection to b5, preparing to penetrating the c-file with my queen. 24...♗xe5 25.dxe5 ♗h5 26.♗c3 ♗d7 27.a4 [27.♗c7 ♗c5 28.♗xa7?? ♖f7 is a miraculous queen-trap. I had to find some other means of breaking through.] 27...♗c5 28.♗a3 ♗xa4 29.♗d4 [29.♗c7 ♗c5 30.♗xd8 ♖xd8 31.♗xc5 bxc5 32.♖xc5 also appears strong.] 29...♗c5 30.♗xc5 bxc5 31.♗xc5 If black plays passively, his

position will simply crumble. Hence, 31...g5 32.♗xa7 gxf4 33.♖c7 ♗g6 34.exf4 e3 35.♗c5 (D)



Now black has to be careful about his own king's safety. This is too slow, however; white now has a forced win. 35...♗g8 36.b6 d4 37.b7 d3 38.♖c8 d2 [38...e2 39.♗xf8+ ♗xf8 40.♖xf8+ ♗xf8 41.♗xe2+-] 39.♗xf8+ ♗xf8 40.♖xf8+ ♗g7 [40...♗xf8 41.b8♗+ ♗g7 42.♗e2 ♗d3 43.♗a7+ ♗h6 44.♗xe3+-] 41.♖d8 1-0

More selected games will be posted on the Melbourne Chess Club website. The URL of the website is <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~chessmel/games.html>.